

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 858

EA 025 235

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TITLE Report on Focus Groups Conducted for the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and the Partnership for Kentucky School Reform.
INSTITUTION Roberts & Kay Inc., Lexington, KY.
SPONS AGENCY Kentucky State Dept. of Education, Frankfort.; Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, Lexington.; Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, Lexington, KY.
PUB DATE Jun 92
NOTE 114p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Majority Attitudes; *Public Opinion; Public Policy; *Public Support; *School Restructuring; *State Legislation
IDENTIFIERS *Focus Groups; *Kentucky

ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that explored focus group participants' views on public schools and Kentucky's recent education reform efforts are presented in this document. In May 1992, 7 focus groups, with a total of 70 participants, were conducted at 6 locations throughout Kentucky. Three groups consisted of citizens who were not public school employees, two consisted of small-business owners and managers, and two included only teachers. Some of the findings demonstrate support for the state's educational reform. Many people are inclined to support reform and value education highly, and even opponents recognize it as a force with staying power. Some elements of reform are based on philosophies that appeal to Kentuckians, and no major concern is brewing about taxes to support reform. However, there are reasons for concern. A sizable number of Kentuckians have formed negative opinions about some key element of reform, and many see it as externally imposed. Citizens and educational policymakers disagree on appropriate education practices and differ in their expectations of change. A conclusion is that the Kentucky Education Reform Act is not in immediate danger but neither is it in prime condition. The greatest difficulties stem from the many new ideas that reform embodies and the gap between education experts' understanding and citizens' and teachers' understandings of those new ideas. Two important factors are the legislature's ongoing strong support and the increase in successful reform implementation. Appendices contain information on methodology, demographic characteristics, and priority assigned to public issues. (LMI)

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REPORT ON FOCUS GROUPS

conducted for

The Prichard Committee for
Academic Excellence

and

The Partnership for Kentucky
School Reform

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June, 1992

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May, 1992 the researchers conducted seven focus groups with a total of 70 participants at the following locations in Kentucky: Bowling Green, Elizabethtown, Fort Mitchell, Madisonville, Prestonsburg, and Somerset (two groups). Each group lasted approximately two hours. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore participants' views on public schools and on the state's recent education reform efforts, in order to understand how best to convey information about the reform, and how to increase Kentuckians' understanding of reform and support for it. The Elizabethtown, Prestonsburg, and one of the Somerset groups consisted of citizens who were not public school employees. The Fort Mitchell and Madisonville groups included only small business owners and managers. The Bowling Green and one of the Somerset groups included only teachers.

Public Schools

Most participants in the groups agree on some important fundamentals: they place a high value on education, they are not satisfied with the job schools are doing, and they want more and better collaboration between the schools and parents, and between schools and the business community. Participants particularly want educators to focus on preparing students so they can speak, write, read, and compute at a reasonable level. Some participants see the "basics" as the necessary foundation for successful employment or further schooling. Most participants said they don't mind paying the taxes necessary to create excellent education systems--provided they can be assured that their tax money is not diverted for other purposes, and provided they can be shown how their tax money has improved the education of children.

Kentucky Education Reform Act

As in 1991, knowledge about the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) remains scant among citizens. A few business people are better informed compared to 1991. Most participants know a bit more about the existence of an overall reform effort than in 1991, and a few know something about specific elements of reform through direct or indirect experience. Teachers are substantially more knowledgeable than in 1991, although most teachers still want more information.

The aspects of reform that have made an impact on the awareness of the largest number of citizen and business participants include the primary program, school-based decision making and the four-year-old program.

Citizens and business people are unsure about how to view the overall intentions of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. They are more comfortable considering the particular aspects of reform which they have experienced directly or about which they have received trusted information.

Some citizens and business people are enthusiastic supporters of one or more reform elements. Their enthusiasm stems from one of two sources: direct experience of those elements as they have been implemented in a supportive school or system, or information that comes from trusted people who have personal contacts with school employees. Some other citizens and business people, who have experience with specific reform efforts in non-supportive schools, have negative views of the efforts.

Teachers' responses to reform are mixed. In considering individual reform provisions, educators respond most strongly--both positively and negatively--to the new primary program and to school-based decision making. They generally respond positively to the four-year-old program. Most also view the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers positively, although they regret the Centers are needed. Teachers have questions about the implementation of site-based decision making, and they have concerns about performance assessment instruments and applications.

Sources of Information

All participants would like to have more concrete, regular, accessible information about where education tax dollars go, and what the Reform Act intends and actually accomplishes. Teachers want more information, and more timely information, about how to do their new work as part of reform. A few teachers and parents reported having regular and frequent information from their school systems, and these people seemed more likely to support reform efforts.

Participants place the highest value on information about the schools and education that does not come through any media--information they get directly through their own presence in the schools, from their children, from dedicated teachers, or from other people with first-hand involvement in schools.

Conclusions

There are many reasons for hope about reform implementation in 1992. Many people are inclined to support reform. Where Kentuckians have experience with implemented reforms that reflect the intent of the legislation, responses are positive. Examples of successful reform implementation are increasing. Even opponents of reform have recognized it as a force with staying power. Some elements of reform--those not aimed directly at changes in classroom practices--are based on philosophies that are

appealing to Kentuckians, and these elements have won considerable support. No major concern is brewing over the taxes that support reform.

On the other hand, there are reasons for concern. A sizable number of Kentuckians have already formed negative opinions about some key element of reform. Neither citizens, business people, nor even teachers assume responsibility for reform; they see reform as imposed from outside. Citizens and teachers have differing views about the role each plays in educating children; these differences complicate the process of building ownership for reform. Although both citizens and education policy makers agree that schools need changing, they do not share a vision of appropriate education practices, and they differ in their expectations of change in schools. Citizens do not support reform as enthusiastically as do education policy makers and advocates.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act is not in immediate danger but it is not in prime condition either. Perhaps the greatest difficulties at this early stage of reform implementation stem simply from the many new ideas reform embodies, and the gap between education experts' understanding of those new ideas and a parallel understanding on the part of teachers and the public. All the demands of these new ideas are counterbalanced by two important factors: the ongoing strong support of the Legislature for the continued implementation of reform efforts over at least the next two years, and the natural increase in successful reform implementation by schools and teachers committed to the purposes of reform. With growing public confidence in the Legislature's long-term commitment, and with the active advocacy of the citizens, teachers, and groups already in strong support of education reform, the situation at the end of the second year of implementation looks reasonable and workable.

II. GUIDE TO THE REPORT AND TRANSCRIPTS

This report presents the key findings from the seven groups, an overview of responses to each question, representative responses on specific topics, and conclusions. The report is accompanied by a separately bound volume of verbatim transcripts.

The most significant findings from the research are reported, with analysis, in Part III, *Key Findings*, pages 6 through 23. The most detailed description of the findings appears in Part IV, *Major Questions and Responses*, pages 24 through 73. Part IV follows the sequence of questions asked in the focus groups and includes many representative excerpts from the verbatim transcripts. Part V, *Conclusions*, pages 74 through 85, places the key findings in the context of the present climate for change in Kentucky. The research methodology is presented in Appendix A, pages 86 through 90.

The researchers produced verbatim transcripts from audio tapes of each session. The separately bound volume of complete transcripts offers the interested reader the opportunity to review all the discussions or to review particular topics in context and in greater detail.

All numerical references in parentheses in the report are to pages in the transcripts. For example, a quotation in the report that is followed by the reference "(PB-15)" can be read in context on page 15 of the Prestonsburg transcript, in the pink section of the bound transcripts. For simplicity, the report refers to the three types of groups as "citizen," "business," and "teacher."

- A) Each new speaker, except for the facilitator, is indicated at the left of the page by an underline and a colon. { ____: }
- B) The facilitator is indicated by an { F: } at the left of the page.
- C) A pause or an interruption is indicated by a series of periods. { }
- D) An individual inaudible word is indicated by an underline. { _____ }
- E) Phrases or sentences that cannot be heard because of overlapping comments or too low a tone of voice are indicated within parentheses. { (INAUDIBLE) }
- F) The key questions for each section are underlined.
- G) Participant comments that are cited in the report or are indicative of general responses are in **bold type**.
- H) The seven transcripts are printed on colored paper.

Tan Section	Bowling Green (Teachers)	BG
Blue Section	Elizabethtown (Citizens)	ET
Yellow Section	Ft. Mitchell (Business)	FTM
Gray Section	Madisonville (Business)	MAD
Pink Section	Prestonsburg (Citizens)	PB
Green Section	Somerset (Teachers)	S/T
White Section	Somerset (Citizens)	S/C

III. KEY FINDINGS

The seven focus groups in this study, conducted with a cross section of Kentucky citizens, business people, and a selected group of teachers, resulted in information that can be analyzed in five broad categories:

- A. The current climate of opinion about schools
- B. The current climate of opinion about education reform
- C. Views of specific elements of reform
- D. Sources of information about education reform
- E. Comparison with 1991 findings

The findings in the first four categories presented in this section of the report represent a synthesis and analysis of participant opinions expressed in the seven sessions in 1992. The fifth category compares findings from this study with findings from a similar study conducted in June, 1991.

SECTION A. THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF OPINION ABOUT SCHOOLS

1. *Participants in all seven groups value education.*

Participants in these seven groups value education and view it as important for making a better life for themselves, their children, and their communities, both now and in the future. Contrary to popular presumptions that Kentuckians fail to place proper value on education, these participants see education as a basic good, even when their individual experiences with schooling have been bad. These views about the importance of education are shared across differences in age, gender, race, region, socio-economic status, and educational attainment.

2. *Participants believe their schools have serious deficiencies.*

Participants are convinced that their schools are failing to produce capable students who are prepared to enter the workforce or pursue higher education. They emphasize the need for a trained or trainable work force in their own work places and more broadly so that Kentucky can compete effectively for jobs.

As participants see it, many Kentucky schools are distracted from their primary mission by an emphasis on fiscal management or sports; unable to deal with unmotivated students; mired in politics; hampered by inadequate funds for fundamental needs; dependent on teachers who are inadequately trained, compensated, and motivated; ruled by arbitrary policies; or overly concerned with issues like attendance. Whatever the reason, participants believe that many children graduate from high school--or simply leave school--without reasonable competency in

calculating, writing, speaking, and reading. They also worry that students leave school with low self-esteem and inadequate life skills.

Citizens presume that the children themselves are not at fault--under the right conditions, they can learn. Citizens feel it is the role of the teachers to motivate students to learn.

Teachers don't agree. They emphasize the family's role in preparing children for school, supporting the school's efforts, and instilling positive attitudes toward education. Teachers feel it is unfair to blame them for results that are not--and should not be--totally within their control.

Business people divide responsibility for education between families and schools. They hold the schools particularly accountable for failing to follow standard planning practices and for inadequate attention to teacher training.

At the same time, business people point out that families need to play the critical role in raising children. Many business people regret the weakened conditions of many families in their communities, and support the schools' efforts, under the Education Reform Act (KERA), to redress the deficits many families face.

3. *All participants strongly want increased parent-teacher collaboration.*

Teachers call for parents to be more involved with their children's education. For the most part teachers see the absence of parent involvement as a problem parents can and should solve. Most of the teachers seemed to see parental involvement primarily as parents providing in-home support for the learning the child is doing at school. Teachers want parents to send their students every morning who

are ready to learn. In addition, some teachers value parent attendance at parent/teacher conferences. When pressed, teachers also acknowledge that many parents have little time for school-related activities because of economic pressures and barriers created by work and school schedules.

For their part, citizens say they know they should be involved more in the schools--they know the teachers can't do everything by themselves. Many citizens who are willing to "get involved" are not involved now, as they see it. They cite their own lack of time, lack of awareness about how to get involved, and feelings of not being welcome at their schools as reasons for not being more involved.

Unlike teachers, citizens do not equate support at home with involvement. Their ideas about how parents can get involved focus mostly on parent/teacher conferences and on direct, in-classroom or in-school work as volunteers or teachers' aides.

4. *All participants want increased school-business collaboration.*

Participants agree that at present, business and industry support for public schools primarily takes the form of monetary contributions. Teachers and business people cite other kinds of support such as career information and school/business partnerships, but note that such support is not consistent. Teachers feel the business community could do more, but they report feeling uncertain about how to approach business people or what to request. Business people express a willingness and desire to do more with the schools but are uncertain how to approach the schools or what to offer. Some business people report that the only contact they have with

public schools is when someone requests a donation. Some citizens think businesses have been schools' best supporters in recent years, and cite Ashland Oil as an example. Overall, the climate appears positive for increased school-business collaboration. All parties are interested, and see few barriers.

5. *Most participants accept the responsibility to pay taxes for schools; all would like more information on the uses of their tax dollars.*

Participants are willing to pay taxes for education. The few expressed overall objections to taxes did not evoke responses from other participants. People are more aware of the property tax increase than the sales tax or conformity with the federal tax.

Across the groups, people make one specific request when taxes are discussed: they want to know what their education taxes purchase. Participants know that taxes fund visible new or improved school facilities, and some cited teacher raises as one tax expenditure, but most said they did not know the other ways in which tax monies are spent. Many participants are concerned that there seems to be insufficient money for education despite the recent tax increase; most have a hard time understanding how this is possible. They resent the way in which the Lottery was touted as an adequate source of funds for education, and continue to ask where the Lottery money goes. They fail to distinguish between Wilkinson campaign rhetoric about the Lottery and what "the state" promised to do with the Lottery money.

SECTION B. THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF OPINION ABOUT EDUCATION REFORM

1. *As information about reform becomes more widespread and as implementation begins to offer some people direct experience with reform, citizen opinions about reform become more polarized.*

Most citizens believe changes in schools are needed. They believe improvement in the schools is necessary for Kentucky to produce a capable work force and to advance in a number of ways. Widespread dissatisfaction with the current situation still exists, and this opens up significant space for reform efforts of any kind. On the other hand, many participants report feeling skeptical about reform efforts because of past negative experiences with schools' efforts to change. For the most part, participants do not understand the scope of the Kentucky Education Reform Act or identify specific reform programs as parts of a larger, coherent reform effort. Most of those who do understand the overall scope of the reform effort have doubts about whether reform can actually be implemented as intended. They want to support some sort of education reform, if it turns out to be as promised.

Those who have direct experience with one or more programs that are part of the reform effort, or who have first-hand or reliable second-hand information, have stronger opinions about reform, both positive and negative. In situations where local schools support reform, contact with reform programs brings positive responses from teachers, citizens, and business people. In these contexts, participants express support for effects or products of reform that are already visible, and they have higher, more positive expectations about further improvements. The exception to this pattern

of responses is the primary program, which is discussed in Section C, Number 1, page 41.

In some places where reform efforts have been implemented with less than strong support or good will, reactions to reform programs are strongly negative. The dearth of information about how to implement particular reforms, and politics-as-usual in selecting school council members in some schools, have caused a number of informed participants, including some teachers, to despair of reform ever happening.

2. *Teacher response to reform is mixed.*

Far more than citizens or business people, teachers recognize reform as a massive effort with many elements. Most teachers seemed familiar with the principles behind most reforms. Knowledge about the rationale for the primary program seemed weak among non-primary teachers, however, and few teachers seemed clear about the principles driving the assessment process. A few teachers in the two teacher groups welcome the challenge of stepping outside old constraints and accepting increased responsibility. Some have been participants in particular programs generated through reform and are strongly supportive of reform overall because they associate reform with the programs they have experienced, and they see positive results for their students.

Even those teachers, however, joined the majority of their colleagues in describing problems caused by change: added responsibility, increased work-load, lack of training and support, anxiety about school performance, and lack of clear direction for specific elements of reform. Teachers report particular frustration

because they have come to expect direction from Frankfort, and that direction has been minimal. A few teachers identify this frustration as part of the price for the greater autonomy envisioned in reform, but most do not.

A few teachers spoke positively about specific elements of reform but remained negative about overall reform efforts. These teachers expressed skepticism based on experiences with past efforts at change. Most teachers feel that they do not know what is expected of them, and they fear they will not be given enough time or enough resources to implement new programs successfully. They see the reforms as having been imposed on them by the legislature or by "outside experts."

Some teachers simply don't trust or share the concepts behind key elements of reform. They either disagree, see the reform as not doable and unworkable, or have no ideas about how reform might be implemented.

3. *Business response to reform is mixed.*

Business people are moderately well informed about reform in general and about specific elements of reform. The most well-informed are married to teachers, or have other close connections to school personnel, or have been involved in some sort of advocacy about reform through an interest group or professional association. The most well informed business people tend to be the strongest supporters of reform.

The rest of the business people reflect the mixed sentiments of the citizen groups, with two differences. First, they are more concerned that students develop the specific skills useful in the work place; many business people do not yet see a connection between reform efforts and improved development of those skills.

Second, the business people were more likely than other citizens or teachers to consider the possible benefits of overall reform for their community and for the state. Perhaps for that reason, business people were also more likely than other groups to consider overall reform as potentially positive, rather than potentially negative.

SECTION C. VIEWS OF SPECIFIC PARTS OF REFORM

1. *Primary Program*

The primary program received strong praise and enthusiastic testimony about its effectiveness from a number of participants who have seen their own children or children in their schools benefitting from it. The great majority of participants, however, including a few who have direct experience with the program, do not understand the rationale behind the program and have many questions and concerns about it--more than they have about any other reform program. They question whether teachers have the training to make it work, or whether brighter and older students can benefit from it. They equate the program with "lack of structure" and fear it will create unrealistic expectations and discipline problems in the higher grades. (See pages 42 and 43 for a detailed list of concerns.) Citizens believe they are being asked to take it on faith that the primary program is a good thing, but in general they don't have much faith in the schools.

2. *Family Resource and Youth Services Centers*

Participants in the groups that discussed this program see the need for the centers and value the services they provide. A few participants had specific knowledge about the services the centers are providing or preparing to provide in their communities, and offered specific examples of how these services are valuable. Most citizens and business people had not heard of the centers.

3. *Four-Year-Old Program*

As with the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, most participants view the four-year-old program in a positive light. Most participants recognize that some children need extra preparation for schooling, although they regret that some families need this extra assistance. A few participants, including some teachers, feel that four-year old children are too young to be the proper concern of the schools, or too young to be "in school" for a portion of every day. When participants learned that participation in the four-year-old program is voluntary, their support for the program increased.

4. *School-Based Decision Making*

This concept received strong, almost unanimous support as a means to improve decisions about what goes on in schools and to involve the community more in the life of the schools. Some participants fear that implementation will be hampered by lack of training, or interference by school administrators, or election of the wrong people to serve on school councils. A few participants had already seen problems arise in their local school councils.

5. *Assessment*

Most participants reported confusion or, at best, a hazy understanding of the new assessment system. Citizens and business people approve of increased accountability, but some in each group questioned the amount of time needed for assessment and the relationship between assessment and what children need to

learn. Teachers feel they have not been given adequate information about the new system or adequate training for it. Some feel that the assessment asks students to perform tasks for which they have not been prepared. A few teachers and parents have had direct experience with portfolios and reported positive student responses to them.

SECTION D. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT EDUCATION REFORM

1. *Teachers are the single most important source of information about reform*

Participants in all groups reported having strong faith in teachers as trustworthy sources of information about schools and education. The importance of the teachers' role in increasing support for reform is underscored by the fact that only children were mentioned nearly as often as teachers when participants identified preferred sources of accurate information about what is happening in schools. Teachers talk about their own opinions and experiences, and they clearly have a profound influence on both the community's and children's opinions and experiences. In addition, teachers talk with each other, and provide essential information to each other on particular aspects of reform.

2. *Children are viewed as an important and reliable source of information*

In the citizen and business groups, participants almost unanimously reported trusting their own and other people's children--especially younger children, who are less guarded in what they say--as accurate, unbiased sources of information about what is going on at school. Children report experiences and observations to trusting parents and other adult friends, who use these reports as the basis of their own opinions about schools. Participants view children as a primary source of direct information about how reform is implemented.

3. *Media have a limited impact*

Most participants reported learning some basic, limited information about reform through newspapers, television, and radio. For participants who watch in-state television stations, television is the most frequent media source for general information about education statewide. Local newspapers are the most frequent media source for information about local schools and school systems. In a few instances participants cited radio advertising--both public service and political ads--as a source of information about reform efforts.

SECTION E. COMPARISON WITH THE 1991 STUDY

1. *Knowledge about the elements of KERA has increased since 1991, primarily through experience*

Since 1991, some participants have acquired direct and indirect experience with specific programs within KERA, as these are implemented in their own or neighboring schools or school systems. Teachers have more generalized information about reform than they had in 1991, and they also know more about specific programs that affect them. For example, elementary teachers know more about the primary program, and high school teachers know more about portfolios as part of the assessment program, although teachers report that their need for information is still great.

2. *Information sources are the same as in 1991*

As in 1991, citizens and business people see teachers as the key communicators about what is happening in the local schools, and teachers provide information directly, through the children they teach, and through their spouses, friends, and acquaintances. Children are a direct source of straight information. Local newspapers provide some information about local schools. Television is the main medium for information about statewide changes in education.

3. *Feelings of need for more information and training remain the same as in 1991*

Although some 1992 participants had some information on reform, most people still said they need more information. As in 1991, teachers complain that they get little information, that the information they get is sometimes not timely or incorrect, and that

they are expected to do work for which they have had little or no training. It is important to note that even though available information has increased since 1991, teachers' feelings of needing more information have not abated. Teachers recognize the complexity and scope of reform, and know they need still more information if they are to implement it properly. On the other hand, many teachers have not adjusted to their new power to make many decisions at the local school level; some of their desire for more information appears to stem from the continuing expectation that the specifics on program implementation should be forthcoming from Frankfort.

4. *Views on increased taxes are the same as in 1991*

As in 1991, with minor exceptions, participants feel the schools need more funds, and believe the need justifies the tax increase. More people volunteered remarks this year such as "I'd pay more," and "Taxes aren't high enough." People remain confused about the Lottery, and feel they have been misled by state government about how much revenue it would generate and what its uses would be. Some people object that taxes intended for education are being used for other purposes. As in 1991, all want to know more about how education dollars are actually spent, and what the public gets from that expenditure.

5. *Local school conditions are the main determinant of opinions, as in 1991*

As in 1991, participants base their opinions about reform on experiences with their own local schools or school systems, and their attitudes toward politics in general. Present local reform efforts and past history form nearly all the bases for

opinions. In those places where participants judge local conditions to be positive, they see change as more possible and more positive. The reverse is usually true where participants judge local conditions to be negative. A small number of participants provided exceptions to this rule--they view their local situations as dreadful but hold out hope that reform can and might make a difference.

In 1992, people have had direct experience with the reform effort. Where schools are implementing reform with a good will, people have something they can see that is good, that is useful, that is already making a difference. But in places where reform is being implemented against the teachers' will, against the administration's will, against the parents' will, the views are negative.

6. *Views on KERA as "one more cycle" that will come and go have changed since 1991*

While most participants still have some doubts about the ultimate staying power and effects of reform, the consistent message from the state, the persistence of legislative support, and evidence from initial implementation of reform elements are beginning to lay some doubts to rest. Even teachers who express the most skepticism talk in terms of a cycle that may take four or five years to play out. In contrast to last year, no participants suggested that the reform will be short-lived, or that the legislature will tamper with it.

7. *Views of KERA are becoming more polarized than in 1991*

Conjecture about what has happened or is likely to happen because of reform is more negative this year than last year, when it was more guarded, or neutral, or optimistic. Opinion is becoming more polarized. Last year, more people were simply neutral. People felt less informed last year, more cautious about coming to final judgment. This year, even though still lacking information, people seemed more willing to form opinions, and more willing to let those opinions be negative. When participants who lack direct experience with reform explained their negative expectations, they said they see the reform as part of an untrustworthy, politicized process, created and supported by people far from them and different from them. Reform may be suffering by being lumped in with other "government" or "political" programs in a year when citizens seem to have particularly negative views of government and politics.

IV. MAJOR SECTIONS OF THE DISCUSSION

This section of the report presents the major sections of the focus group discussions, the key questions asked in each section, and typical or important participant responses. Although moderators asked most questions to all groups, some variations exist among citizen groups, teacher groups, and business groups. These are noted where appropriate. In addition, some variation in questions occurred due to time constraints and the flow of conversation. The parentheses after each key question identify the focus groups in which moderators asked that question and give the page numbers in those transcripts where the question and responses can be found.

SECTION A. ATTITUDES ABOUT SCHOOLS

1. *Opening questions for citizens and business people*

Key Question:

What do you think schools are good at? (ET-1, FTM-1, MAD-1, PB-1, S/C-1)

The moderator asked this question to the citizen groups and the small business groups. Participants in all five groups had difficulty talking about what schools do well. While a few participants praised a few particular schools in general terms, most participants either remained quiet in response to this question or expressed opinions about things the schools do not do well.

Representative Responses:

I think, basically, they have a good program. (ET-2)

I think the public schools are good at educating the masses with the resources and the constraints that are put upon them by state and federal government. (FTM-2)

You know, a lot depends on the school. (FTM-2)

I think right now with everything in this area, with the school system, it's all negative when you first think of it. (S/C-1)

There's too much politics in the school system. (PB-3)

I think they're really, really concentrating now more on trying to keep the dropout level down.... (S/C-2)

Key Question:

What do schools do least well? (ET-3, FTM-2, MAD-1, S/C-3)

Participants expressed three dominant concerns. First, a number of participants believe that schools do not adequately equip students to get a job or attain higher education. Participants typically expressed this concern as a fear that students leave school without developing the ability to read, compute, and write adequately.

Discipline and orderliness in school also concerned some participants in several groups. The concern about discipline often led to discussion and seemed linked with participants' third shared concern--the lack of effective communication between schools and parents. At this point or at other points during the discussions, some participants in all groups expressed concern about the attention schools give sports at the expense of academics.

Representative Responses:

It just don't seem like they get into the....enough basics.... (ET-5)

....there's a lack of communication between the teachers and the parents.... (ET-5)

They lack in initiative and creativity, too. (FTM-3)

I think that a lot of schools work more on winning the football tournament than they do on educating their kids. (FTM-5)

Key Question:

What is your single biggest concern about your public schools?
(FTM-5, MAD-8, S/C-8)

In the two business groups and the one citizen group that addressed this question, the concerns ranged from violence and drugs to the perceived domination of schools by the courts and legislature. Participants in all groups also mentioned the difficult situations families face, and the strained communications between families and schools. These same concerns came up spontaneously in all the citizen groups, where participants expressed grave worries about family/school relationships. Participants cited these examples of failed communication between schools and families: a girl with good grades who was held back for poor attendance; a boy who skipped a grade on school advice and then was held back because of grade and discipline problems; a boy whose teacher counted the number of times he squirmed and presented a written record to the parent without explaining adequately why the record was kept; and a girl who had nearly completed high school before her family

learned she could barely read. One bad experience, if it's bad enough, seems to prejudice people's attitudes toward the schools.

Representative Responses:

The courts and legislatures are wrecking [schools] just tearing them down. (FTM-5)

I think the family unit has degenerated so much over the years that the school system almost, to get us out of the hole, should consider possibly having classes in the evening that includes parents, to deal with issues like self-esteem and parenting techniques and discipline issues, because it's so important to have what's happening at the school also happen at home.... (FTM-7)

Parents don't know how to diplomatically deal with teachers. (FTM-10)

I think the violence and the drugs and the....the social problems....[are my biggest concerns] (S/C-8)

Key Question:

What change would make the greatest improvement in your schools?
(FTM-10, MAD-11, PB-5, S/C-9)

Participants identified improved teaching, better parenting practices, and more parental involvement in the education process as critical, necessary improvements in their schools. A participant in one of the business groups advocated parental choice among public schools as one device to invigorate parental involvement. Participants in a citizen group identified administrators as the source of problems.

Representative Responses:

I think that the parents should take more interest in the school system and go visit them.... (PB-6)

I think we need better teachers, personally. (S/C-9)

The administrators around here don't listen to the parents. (S/C-12)

Key Question:

Who would you trust to lead in making improvements in your schools?
(FTM-14, MAD-14, PB-6, S/C-14)

Although a few participants identified principals as trustworthy leaders, most participants in two business groups and two citizen groups chose either the teachers, the parents, or both as appropriate leaders for important changes in schools. Although they agreed on who should lead improvements, participants did not agree on the kinds of improvements these leaders should promote. Some participants think students need to concentrate on the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and should be required to learn arithmetic without calculators and computers so they will understand mathematical principles and processes. Other participants think students need to be prepared to go to college, and schools should focus on 21st century skills. Some participants think schools push students too hard and should slow down, while others think the schools are not asking enough of students.

Representative Responses:

I think that the trained educators, if we could get their input, they're the ones who are trained to do their job and let's let them do it. (MAD-14)

[I would trust] just the everyday classroom teacher that has the most time spent with the children. (PB-7)

I like the parent advocate image and where they now have parents that can run to the....I want to call it site-based committees....where they have parents involved and take away all the power from the administration to make changes in your school that affect your children. I think that's

wonderful. I think there should be more parent involvement. I mean, from every level. On everything. (S/C-14)

2. *Opening questions for teachers*

Key Question:

How do you think teaching as a profession is faring today? (BG-1&2, S/T-1)

The moderator asked the two teacher groups these questions instead of the previous opening set addressed to citizens and business people. Responses to the first key question fell into three categories. First, a small number of teachers think teaching is faring better than it ever has. This group includes people who have direct, positive experience with new programs created as a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. It also includes teachers who have heard from other teachers about positive results of education reform.

A second group believes that teaching is becoming more difficult. These teachers, most of whom have at least fifteen years of experience, expressed frustration that teaching has become harder in the past few years, and that support from parents and communities seems to be in decline. Teachers with 16 or more years in the system made up 63% of the total in the two groups, and many of these teachers reported deep concerns about the future of their profession.

A third group of teachers, represented in both teacher focus groups, responded to the question in terms of their recent experiences with changing demands stemming from education reform. These teachers, some of whom support the overall aims of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, report varying degrees of

stress, pressure, and exhaustion as a result of the demands to implement new teaching practices.

Representative Responses:

Teachers are tired. (BG-1)

Whatever goes wrong in society, it's the teacher's fault. (BG-2)

We can't make those kids learn. It starts somewhere else before they even get to us. So I don't think it's fair to put those expectations on the teachers. (BG-2)

....we've had some teachers that have gone on into the ungraded and they're coming back and telling us it's working well... (BG-3)

There's not enough time. You're pressured for time. (BG-6)

And there are so many, many more things to work with now than we had a few years ago. (BG-8)

I think teaching is faring better than it ever has. (S/T-1)

....one thing I guess that KERA is doing is, some of the money that's coming down is going directly to help the teachers in their classrooms. It seems like there's a bit more money that's going to the teacher. I think overall that's helping the teachers as far as feeling like someone is there to help you, at least, we're getting some assistance now. So I think, overall, the attitude of teachers is better in some areas. (S/T-2)

I've always loved teaching, but I feel some frustration because I don't think we get the respect that we deserve from the public and, also, from our students, even at the lower level now. (S/T-2)

I feel a lot more, I think, stress now in the last few years than I did when I first began teaching, and I think a lot of it is, I guess, the breakdown of the family. (S/T-3)

Key Question:

What do you most want teachers to do? (S/T-4)

The moderator asked only the Somerset teachers what they most want teachers to do. In most cases, responses mostly reflected distress and worry over the uncertainties of meeting the demands of education reform.

Representative Responses:

I want to teach what's in the curriculum. I don't want to be responsible for things that I felt I was responsible for as a parent. (S/T-4)

I feel like that we're being given more say in what happens to us, but I feel like that's a big thing, having an input into the legislation and the things that affect us. (S/T-4)

I feel like lately so much has just been thrown at me, that I'm having, it's taking me a long time to sort out all the little things. And this year, as a fourth grade teacher, they started talking about these portfolios; but, then, like, in February we had this big meeting that really told us what they were, that we should have had in August. (S/T-5)

Key Question:

What is your single biggest concern about teaching? (S/T-6)

The moderator asked Somerset teachers about their biggest concern. The teachers who responded identified discipline, absence of student motivation, insufficient teacher autonomy, and difficult working conditions.

Representative Responses:

Discipline, right now. It's creating more problems. (S/T-6)

I guess the biggest thing that was concerning me is just the fact that kids don't seem ... the majority don't want to do anything. (S/T-7)

....they [administrators] do not let teachers manage their time in a constructive way. (S/T-9)

Any kind of courtesy you would extend to an adult in any kind of job situation, teachers are not granted on a daily basis. (S/T-13)

Key Question:

What change would make the greatest improvement in the teaching profession? (S/T-9)

In response to this question, the Somerset teachers expressed a wish for more highly motivated students, more teacher input into decision making, and more support from parents for key values that make education at school an easier task.

Representative Responses:

If we could be sent a product, be sent a student that would really want to learn, have a desire to excel and what a blessed profession it would be. (S/T-9)

The General Assembly's made it all law now and it's law that we do it. So, really, what we think really doesn't matter. (S/T-13)

SECTION B. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT EDUCATION

Key Questions:

Where do you get the information you have about what's happening in schools? How do you know? (BG-11, ET-21, MAD-14, PB-10, S/T-13)

Why is that source important to you? (PB-10, S/T-20)

What's the single most important source of information that helps you form your opinions about what's going on and what needs to be done in your schools? (MAD-16, S/T-17)

What sources are the most reliable in your schools? (S/C-22, S/T-20)

Respondents in the citizen and business groups favored teachers, students, and newspapers as sources of information. Teachers reported getting information from other teachers, students, school personnel--such as janitors, secretaries, and bus drivers--and newspapers. A number of participants in several groups also mentioned radio as a source of information.

Parents, business people, and teachers who reported receiving information regularly from official sources at their schools--about one-third of participants--seemed most satisfied with the amount and extent of information they get. Another one-third of participants reported having inadequate information, and expressed frustration on that account. As noted in other sections of this report, people who lack information tend to be negative about reform.

Overall, responses to the follow-up questions confirm that teachers are the primary preferred source of information, with students a second highly favored source. Most important, participants place greatest confidence in information they receive

directly from another person, or from a consistent official source such as a newsletter. Teachers, as well as members of the business and citizen groups, value news about education that comes from the newspapers. Television news is also important, participants reported, but it provides less detail, and in some parts of the state has tended to focus on controversies.

Most teachers do not report getting information from professional associations or meetings with other teachers to any great extent, although some teachers said they would like to get more information directly from teachers in other schools and in other systems. Although there were exceptions in all three groups, the large majority of participants in the seven groups reported that they could still use more information from reliable sources about their own schools, about education in general, and about the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

Representative Responses:

I learn from my neighbor's child. (ET-21)

A lot of my clients are school teachers so I get it every day from one source or another. (MAD-16)

....up to about six or eight months ago every meeting they had was a war, so to speak, and made the front page of the paper, it made the radio, and it made the TV stations. That's basically what people know about the education process. (MAD-16)

I hear more on the news on television than I ever get through memos or, yeah, newspapers. (S/T-14)

...the single most important source is kids coming out of the schools. (MAD-17)

I think I would think of the school teachers themselves and the principals [as a source]. (MAD-17)

....even in our own school system, you know, it's hard to get information from our superintendent. You know, we're usually the last one to know if something happens in our system. (S/T-17)

Key Question:

How about education more generally? How do you know what's going on? (BG-9, ET-30, FTM-15, S/C-15, S/C-17)

When asked about sources of information about education more generally, participants cited a wide variety of sources, including "Professional journals, meetings, principals" (BG-9); "Television, radio" (ET-31); "Newspapers, first hand." (S/C-15). They cited media of various kinds as often as they cited personal contacts as sources for this more general information.

Representative Responses:

Just look in your mailbox. Every day. (BG-9)

I communicate with the people that I know in other communities.... (ET-31)

Usually the dailies. (FTM-15)

I've gotten most of my information from newsletters from the school. (FTM-15)

I watch Lexington, WKYT, and I watch those special programs they have on the weekends, Education Update. (S/C-16)

I get it from coworkers also, that have children in various schools. You know we talk a lot during the day about problems with the children. And then family. When families get together. And of course the children themselves tell you a-plenty. (S/C-17)

The newspaper's good because it's all wrote out and it's laying in the home. Anybody's got an opportune time, they can pick it up and read one. They can pick up the details, whereas, if you don't get it on the local radio, well, you may completely miss it. (S/C-18)

Key Question:

What's the most reliable source of information about what's happening generally? (BG-12, FTM-18, MAD-19, PB-13, S/C-18, S/T-17)

When asked to identify the most reliable sources for information about what is happening generally, participants used their local schools as the reference base, and again stated that they rely on direct contact with children, teachers, and other individuals who are in the schools. A number of people mentioned "the grapevine" as their most reliable source.

Representative Responses:

....I depend on my principal. (BG-12)

I'd say the teachers, because they're dealing with it on the front line. (FTM-19)

I think the secretaries at the schools probably know more about what's going on than anyone else. (FTM-20)

I have to rely on other parents. (MAD-19)

The handbook that they give you at the first of the year has got all the information and the changes that have been made for that year in it. And what happens from there, you just have to get the paper for it, or somebody else from word of mouth. (S/C-20)

The janitors usually know more than we do. (S/T-17)

I get from reading, I get a lot from reading the newspaper. I get the Capital Report when the Assembly is in session and I read that, and I attend PCEA meetings. (S/T-20)

I feel that the quality of in-service has improved in the last few years. (S/T-22)

SECTION C. KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EDUCATION REFORM

1. *Awareness of reform efforts and implementation*

Key Questions:

Are you aware of the reform effort? (ET-32&34, FTM-20, MAD-20, PB-15, S/C-25)

How did you find out about what it (KERA) was? (BG-14, PB-15, S/C-25, S/T-26)

What have you heard about the changes that are caused by this legislation? (FTM-22, MAD-20, S/C-25)

What else is in the Reform Act? (BG-15, FTM-22, S/T-27)

Have you seen effects of reform in your local schools? (FTM-23, S/C-26, S/T-28)

The moderators did not ask the teacher groups about their general awareness of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. In the groups in which the question was asked, one or two persons in each group demonstrated familiarity with the Kentucky Education Reform Act as a whole. In all five groups a majority were familiar with one or more aspects of reform, such as "Your school-based councils" (ET-35), or with recent changes in their local schools that they believed to be resulting from the Reform Act. Two or three people in each group seemed to be completely unfamiliar with the Reform Act. Some people attributed local school policies to the Reform Act.

Representative Responses:

I'm aware of it. I don't know what it consists of.... (ET-32)

Attendance is one of the requirements with the act. (ET-35)

And they just finished all this testing (ET-36)

Tax increase. (MAD-20)

There was a tremendous amount of media coverage on it and the process developed and if you wanted to you could certainly read and find out what the illustrious legislators were doing. (MAD-20)

I'm aware of it. But as to what the outline of it is, I don't know. (PB-15)

Teachers reported learning about the Kentucky Education Reform Act through in-service programs or meetings at school, as well as through the news media. The citizen groups and business groups reported getting most of their knowledge from news media. In the case of several participants in the citizen and business groups, information about the Kentucky Education Reform Act has come regularly and in ample quantity from their local school system.

Representative Responses:

I heard it at a school meeting. (PB-16)

....they had a bus in the parade. (PB-16)

I listen to the news and then I read the Lexington paper. You can understand very plain. (PB-17)

In the citizen and business people groups, the primary program was the most frequently identified aspect of reform. Participants also mentioned many other elements of reform--both accurately and inaccurately--including smaller class sizes and increased emphasis on attendance, school councils, the pre-school program, an intended decrease in nepotism and increase in parental involvement, school councils, the assessment program, and more.

Teachers reported awareness about most or all aspects of reform. Even though some teachers said they need more comprehensive information about reform in general or more details about specific reform elements, almost all members of the two teacher groups seemed to be knowledgeable about the fundamentals of each key reform element.

Representative Responses:

I've heard that there's been a lot of things asked of our school systems that have not been done yet. From what I gather we've been asked to do a lot of social services and incorporate a lot of social services into our school systems. The funding is not coming down from the state or the federal government to adequately fund those programs. (MAD-20)

Heard that it's caused an increase in parental involvement and it's supposed to decrease nepotism. That it was supposed to increase funding for a number of different things. And all those kind of things and that ultimately it was going to be the most marvelous thing that's happened to education in this Commonwealth for a number of years. (MAD-21)

Improved technology and use of computers. (MAD-21)

At the primary level, there is a pretty dramatic change because they will be grouping them together.... (MAD-21)

....they are different as far as hiring superintendents.... (MAD-21)

Different class sizes is one of the main things I've heard. (S/C-25)

Attendance is real important. (S/C-25)

School-based management. (BG-15)

Performance assessment. (BG-15)

Changed the funding of the schools. (FTM-22)

Overwhelming amounts of paperwork. (FTM-22)

Money being taken away from teachers and more work being put on them. (FTM-22)

My kids have taken more standardized tests this year. (FTM-23)

A lot of new social programs you know, that ought to help. (FTM-23)

I heard that there was an attempt to kind of lean toward the Montessori system, and I, personally, favor the Montessori system. (FTM-23)

When asked to describe any known effects of reform, participants reported observing, participating in, or hearing about a variety of reform efforts in local schools. They tended to have positive responses to some of the effects, such as those associated with school councils, the four-year-old program, and extended school services, but they tended to respond negatively to a number of the effects they have observed or heard about. These include a reported decline in teacher morale in some districts, and the reported loss of one district's funding because "money was funnelled to, you know, the less wealthier school districts, as they call it, to make it more fair and even." (FTM-24)

Representative Responses:

....the teacher morale is going down. (FTM-24)

I think it seems like we're more, getting more to the fact that we have to worry about money more than teaching the children that go there. (FTM-24)

I was hoping to see more open-mindedness and, I guess, reaction from teachers, administrators, whoever, that, "Hey, there's some neat stuff in here [KERA] and maybe this will work." (FTM-25)

I think the testing for the kindergarten kids was much more detailed this year. (S/C-26)

Extended services are being cut due to a lack of funding. (S/T-28)

2. *Elements of reform*

a) **Primary Program**

Key Questions:

Are you aware of the primary program? (BG-16, ET-15, FTM-25, PB-19, S/C-28)

Is it good? Is it bad? Is it neutral? (BG-17, MAD-22)

What do you predict will happen with the primary program? (FTM-28, MAD-24, S/C-29)

What can you think of that stands in the way of progress on this goal, to have a primary program? (FTM-28, PB-21)

The primary program attracted more comments from participants in all groups than any other single aspect of reform. A small number of participants have already had direct experience with the primary program, either through teaching in a primary classroom or through having a child in a primary classroom. A slightly larger number have reliable or trustworthy sources who are in direct contact with a primary program. These include business people whose spouses teach in a primary program, and teachers who teach at the middle school or high school level in a system where the primary program is being implemented.

Parents and teachers in systems where the primary program is already being implemented and welcomed tend to speak positively about the program. Among people whose knowledge comes from secondary trusted sources of information,

responses are mixed. Some favor the program, while others raise questions about its effectiveness.

A majority of participants in all citizen and business groups have no direct experiences with the primary program and no trusted sources of information about it. Among these participants and among four participants who do have first-hand knowledge, concerns about the program outweigh support. The concerns stem from many opinions, beliefs, and expectations. These include the following:

- o Fear that children who learn more quickly or are in third grade will not be challenged by the program
- o A perception that the program is "unstructured," and that classrooms will be in chaos.
- o Fear that discipline problems will arise from lack of structure and from mixing students of several age groups in one classroom
- o Concern that younger children will be taught by older children rather than by teachers, and that this teaching will be ineffective
- o A sense that children in the primary program are "guinea pigs"
- o Worry that absence of grades will make it more difficult to know if a child is progressing
- o Worry that teachers have not received sufficient preparation and training, and that there will not be adequate funding for new materials
- o Concern that the primary program, like the open classroom of a generation ago, is a passing fad
- o Concern that parents will not understand the program and will resist it
- o Concern that teachers will not be willing to change and will not implement the program whole-heartedly

- o Concern that children who have more freedom and more choices in the primary years will disrupt or have difficulty adjusting to more traditionally structured classrooms in fourth grade and later years
- o Worry that some children will be placed in classrooms taught by teachers who are "profoundly weak;" the fears are especially strong because the children may have the same teacher for three years

Representative Responses:

And I have seen my child at the first grade reading books that I didn't think he should be reading until the second and third grade...He's been challenged to meet his expectations from being exposed to some older children. (ET-16)

....how would you know these older children aren't just coming right out and telling what the answer is without having these younger children work it out for themselves? (ET-18)

The children like it. (ET-18)

Well, it's got ups and downs. There are parts of it good and parts that needs a lot of improvement, I think. (PB-19)

It hasn't worked yet. It may in time, but I feel like my child is a guinea pig. And I really resent it. Because it started right when she was going into second grade. And her teacher has expressed concern to me personally that it has not helped the higher....she's up on the top of the scale, okay? You've got low functioning, average kids and then you've got accelerated. And they're all mixed in together. And they're all supposed to help the lower level and pull them up. But to whose expense? You know, while these up here are trying to raise the others up, they're being held back. (S/C-28)

I don't think it should be left up to the other children in the class to do the teaching. (S/C-29)

....it sounds good and it looks good and it's exciting if we had the funding. (BG-17)

In my school, we're kind of divided. (BG-17)

If teachers aren't for it, it's not going to work. If they're not given the tools they need. If they're not given the training they need. (BG-18)

So I think one of the big things that has to be done is to make the parents informed as well as the students for success. (BG-20)

I know it works, I've seen it work; I believe very strongly in it, but my fear is that the teachers aren't trained to deal with this.... (FTM-26)

If you have a child that's in one or two, first and second grade, it'd be great because they can see the third grader and they can learn from that third grader. But, I don't understand what the third grader can learn from the second and first graders. (FTM-27)

I'm for the primary program but I do think we will show an improvement but it will be at the lower end and at the expense of some of our better students. (MAD-24)

I've seen some of the ungraded primaries and I'm amazed at all the chaos and what appears to be bedlam but it's amazing to me that they are getting the instruction and seems that the classes I've been in seem to be working. But it's taking one hell of an effort to do it by the teacher. (MAD-26)

When asked to predict future prospects for the primary program, the business and citizen groups responded with negative predictions.

I think most of the teachers see this as a similar thing that Kentucky tried to do back in the seventies, and it failed itself, it collapsed on itself, because the teachers didn't get training in these new ways of thinking and techniques of teaching classrooms and it's being forced upon them. Here, you've got a deadline, you know, the support's not there to help reach the goal. (FTM-28)

I think that the parents are going to protest, the....market is not going to accept it. (MAD-24)

I think if parents have their say about it, which I doubt if they will, that it will not last long. (S/C-30)

Responses to the question about barriers to progress for the primary program reflected the same concerns as those expressed in predictions about its future.

Participants identified "Ignorance" (FTM-29) and "Funding" (FTM-29) as two important barriers.

Representative Responses:

The teachers have to be sold on the whole thing. (FTM-29)

Parents not understanding the concept, either, probably will hurt the program. (FTM-29)

b) Family Resource and Youth Services Centers

Key Questions:

Are you aware of the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers?
(BG-32, FTM-36, PB-23, S/T-54)

The Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, is that a good idea?
(BG-33, ET-38, PB-25)

Responses to the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers were largely positive in each of the five groups that discussed them at any length. While some participants said they wished the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers were not necessary, they acknowledged that it is good for the schools to be providing the kinds of services the children need. Participants seemed most aware of the medical services provided by Family Resource Centers. Participants in two groups specifically identified eyeglasses as a service associated with the Family Resource Centers.

Representative Responses:

So far they have really helped with the children that are there. (PB-23)

If a child needs a doctor appointment or whatever or even eyeglasses, you know, they have had children who have had sight problems who can't afford glasses so they have made available the glasses and the office visit for them. I mean it's free. (PB-23)

If a child needs glasses, you know, they....they will direct them to where they can get the glasses. (ET-37)

It's very good. (ET-39)

And it seems to be working real well. (ET-38)

That's a must. (PB-26)

It's taking away from the parenting responsibility of the parents, but I think there's a need for it because there's so many parents that don't take the responsibility. (FTM-37)

c) **Four-year-old Program**

Key Question:

Are you aware of the four-year-old program? (BG-42, PB-26, S/C-31, S/T-39)

Participants in the two teacher groups and in two of the citizen groups discussed the four-year-old program. Responses were for the most part positive. The basis for positive response is participants' awareness that such programs give an extra boost to children who need it. When participants unfamiliar with the program learned it is voluntary, they responded more positively. A small number of participants objected to the preschool program for one of these reasons:

- o Four-year-olds are too young to be away from home

- o The program is limited and does not permit children from middle income families to participate

Representative Responses:

I feel positive about it, from what I've seen at school. (S/T-40)

This is our second year with a four-year-old program, and I've heard the kindergarten teachers say that the children that were in the four-year-old program are doing very well. (S/T-41)

If we had the ideal situation with the family, we wouldn't need that at all, but we don't have. (S/T-41)

You've got to make less than this amount or be on free lunch in order to even come to the four-year-old program. My tax money is paying for this program. Why can't my son participate in this program? That angers me. (BG-43)

I love the program. I think it's wonderful. (BG-44)

....when you start a child at four years old, I think it's kind of ridiculous. (S/C-31)

d) School-based Decision Making

Are you aware of school-based decision making? (BG-47, FTM-32, MAD-28, PB-22, S/T-45)

How do you feel about this part of reform? (FTM-32, MAD-28, S/T-45)

What would you predict will happen with this part of reform? (FTM-34, MAD-31, S/T-48)

Can you make suggestions about ways that this area of reform might progress faster than it is now? (FTM-35, S/T-49)

What helps it? What hinders it? (BG-50, ET-36)

All of the teachers and roughly half of the participants in the other five focus groups seemed aware of the move to school-based decision making, although only a

small number have had direct experience with a school council. With some exceptions, participants support the intention behind school-based decision making. In most ways, support for school-based decision making is stronger than support for any other aspect of reform. The participants' reasons for supporting school-based decision making are straightforward: it increases parents' and teachers' control over their own schools, and it permits policy-making that suits local conditions.

A small number of participants expressed some dissatisfaction with the implementation of school-based decision making even though they support the intention. In these cases, participants reported that the process has become politicized, or they expressed concerns that, in the long run, only people with middle-class, flexible jobs will be able to serve as parent representatives on the councils. Some teachers in a school system where councils are just being elected for the first time, and where local politicians and traditional school politics have reportedly influenced the outcome of the first elections, expressed general concerns about the councils and specific concerns that the councils will be making decisions about each subject area in the school without adequate information.

Representative Responses:

Yes. Wish we had it. (BG-47)

....but within our system we've kind of decided that some of the principals don't like school-based decision making because it threatens them--threatens their power. So we don't hear a lot about it at my school. (BG-48)

I think it's probably the best part of the whole thing. (FTM-32)

It gets the politics out of it, or some of the politics out. (FTM-32)

I think it's one of the weaker areas. In concept it's strong and some schools are more operative and it will flourish. It will just do great. But the training is miserable for these people, you know, the three hour program and people are signing up to be on site based teams and management and don't have any idea of what they are getting into.... (PB-29)

I think it's going to be great if people would just stick to the focus of what they are there for. (PB-22)

I think they ought to have the people of the community making more decisions in their principles of leadership in the school than the superintendent and two or three people making the decision for the whole county. (PB-23)

If it's truly democratic, it's good, but there's a lot of politicking.... (S/T-45)

....I'm a little bit disillusioned with it. (S/T-45)

It's not a utopia, but, I honestly believe it's the right way to go.... (S/T-45)

....I really believe that there are some systems that's going to take site-based and they're going to make a go of it and it's going to be a blessing to them. I do believe there's other systems that will not.... (S/T-50)

I think site-based will work when we get personalities out of it. (S/T-50)

....the end product two, three, four, whatever years down the road will get to where we want to be with decision making. So teachers, parents, the administrator can all work together to do what's best for their school and their location and for their kids. (BG-52)

I work in a very high percentage of at-risk kids. Well, for us to meet the needs of those children, we do not need the same policy that another school down the road can use very effectively to meet the needs of their children. So we need that power to be able to make the decisions within our building that best serve our, you know, population. (BG-52)

e) **Assessment System**

Key Questions:

Are you aware of the assessment system? (BG-53, ET-40, FTM-43, MAD-24, PB-27, S/C-33)

What do you think about it? How's it working? (BG-53, FTM-43, S/C-33, ST-29)

What do you predict will happen with the assessment part of reform? (S/T-31)

All teachers and many other participants reported a beginning awareness of the assessment program. This awareness may have been higher than it would have been at any other previous time, since many schools were conducting their assessments within days of the time the focus groups were conducted. Information about the assessment program, even among teachers, is new enough and scarce enough to prevent most people from having formed their final opinions.

Among citizen and business groups, interest in assessment is strong. Some participants expressed support for the concept of measuring school, teacher, and student performance. On the other hand, some of those same participants, and others as well, expressed concerns about the amount of time spent in the actual assessment process, because that time is taken from regular instruction.

Some participants acknowledged their own ambivalence toward the assessment system's positive and negative attributes. In addition to sharing opinions about assessment, participants asked each other a number of questions that reveal concerns:

- o Will the assessment be meaningful and accurate?
- o How will the sampling be done? Is it possible that a sample of bright students will be tested one year and compared with a sample of poor students the next to determine how well a school is doing? How broad will the sample be?
- o Is there a way to alleviate the pressure teachers are experiencing to keep their schools afloat?
- o Has there been an attempt to manipulate the baseline assessment this year so that it will be easier to demonstrate improvement in future years?

Representative Responses:

There is an assessment program, but I think part of what they're assessing from the children's test is the capabilities of the teachers. (ET-41)

I think it's taking away 14 days this year, or close to that, of her being educated, so they can test themselves and pound their chests and feel good about themselves, and I say "them"....I'm talking about legislators, in my opinion. (FTM-41)

Our fate is in the hands of those people that draw those tests up. Just like it has always been. (MAD-34)

Some of the teachers I've talked to have fears that they are going to go out and test the good class. If that's going to be the base, then next year they are going to test the bad class. And then they say, gosh, it's going to look like we are going backwards. That's a fear I've heard a number of teachers.... (MAD-34)

I think it's great. (ET-41)

We've tested them to death this year. And a lot of the kids are bored with it so they're not going to do well. (BG-55)

They need to assess what the kids are learning; they need to have some kind of data, you know, to say that kids are learning or not; but, you know, there's a down side of it, too.... (FTM-43)

We're doing more assessment than we are teaching. We can't teach for assessing. (S/T-29)

It really concerns me that something good comes along and then it's dropped or you get enthusiastic about it and then it's changed, and there's that lack of continuity or follow-through because of lack of funding....And we have experienced that, those of us who have been teachers for many years, with each change of administration or whatever, we've gone through a lot of times and it becomes frustrating.... (S/T-34)

3. *Overall response to reform*

Key Question:

On balance....do you believe the Reform Act is a good thing, a bad thing, or doesn't make any difference? (BG-61, FTM-45, MAD-37, PB-28, S/C-36, S/T-55)

Overall, more than half of the participants in all seven groups indicated that they expect reform to make a positive difference. Nearly half of the participants either said they expect reform to make no difference or expressed negative opinions about it.

In assessing reform as a whole, most participants seemed to use as a frame of reference the specific reforms implemented in the schools with which they are most familiar. Participants who see their schools as having implemented reform enthusiastically, and who feel positive about specific aspects of reform as implemented in those schools, tend to feel that, on balance, the Reform Act is a good thing. Participants who perceive reform elements as having been implemented halfheartedly or poorly in their schools tend to have a generally negative view of reform. In general, the people who have more direct experience with implemented reforms seemed more likely to view reform overall in a positive light.

Representative Responses:

Too much at one time. (BG-62)

....they scared us with it. (BG-63)

Hope this is not a fad, comes and goes. (BG-63)

I think that it will move Kentucky forward for the first three or four years because everybody thinks we're snappy. You know, we've got the snappy new legislation, we pulled all things together, everybody will take a second look at Kentucky. In terms of the "Well, we have better students, will the base line data be better on our students or worse on our students?" I don't think it will make any difference. (MAD-37)

I think this being a learning experience for our educators will make them better. Therefore, it will move us forward. (MAD-38)

I feel better about it than anything that's come our way in I don't know how long for education. (PB-28)

Key Questions:

Do you think this new legislation will move Kentucky forward? (ET-49, FTM-45, S/C-36, S/T-55)

What would you predict for the future of the reform? (MAD-36)

Participants are not eager to embrace broad positive claims for the Education Reform legislation. While a majority of participants could be described as guardedly optimistic, and a few are decidedly negative, many said the old system is failing and something needs to change. Most agree with an Elizabethtown participant who suggested a "kind of a wait and see" (ET-50) attitude as the appropriate one.

Representative Questions:

I think it'll be better than it was. Now I think we will improve now. (ET-50)

I don't think it can hurt us, the way it was going. (FTM-45)

Something had to be done. (FTM-46)

I don't have the confidence in it I'd like to have. (S/C-37)

We have no choice. We can't go back. And if you can't go back, where can you go besides forward? (S/T-56)

One step forward and two back. (S/T-56)

I would like for it to be some sort of international standard. (MAD-36)

Conceptually, I think that you're going into a lot of head winds. (MAD-36)

4. *Responses to taxes*

Key Question:

How do you feel about the taxes that were raised to support education reform? (BG-65, ET-52, FTM-46, AD-38, PB-29, S/C-39, S/T-57)

Moderators asked this question in all seven groups. Although two or three of the 70 participants indicated displeasure with taxes, the substantial majority in every group demonstrated acceptance of the taxes. Participants expressed concern, however, that all the money raised in taxes for education may not actually reach the schools, and that it is unclear what the tax money actually purchases. Participants also seemed to feel that the state had reneged on a promise that the Lottery money would go to education.

A few people in the groups expressed the opinion that taxes are too low. One person said, "I really don't feel like we've spent enough money on education." (S/C-40) Another said taxes "are not high enough." (FTM-46)

Representative Responses:

How much money do....do the schools get out of that Lottery money?
Does anybody know that? (ET-54)

I don't know that they're going to where it's supposed to go. There's not enough money going to education (FTM-46)

I don't want to pay for Ashland, Kentucky. I mean, to be perfectly honest, I don't care if their students down there don't ever pass. Up here is where I'm concerned about. I know that's a selfish point of view but I don't want to pay extra taxes if my money's going to go down to support people who are not paying their fair share of taxes.... (FTM-47)

I don't mind the taxes. I'm willing to pay. I think a lot of the shortfall is just the fact that the economy is lower than the amount of money that Frankfort thought they were taking in. And so we have the reappraisals of how quickly we are going to fund KERA and....but I'm willing to make the sacrifice and they can raise it however they want to. Right now I'm still willing to pay. (MAD-41)

I'm a property owner and I don't have any children and I agree with the fact that I'm willing to put my money into education. (MAD-41)

Well, if you're going to get anything, you're going to have to pay taxes. (PB-29)

I would like to see more of where our school tax money goes to. (PB-29)

I resent them [taxes]. (S/C-39)

I don't think all the increases or anything we have done has made it to education yet. It's made it to the people, to the thinkers; but it's not made it to the doers. (S/T-58)

SECTION D. EDUCATION RANKED WITH OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

Key Question:

I'm going to ask you to rank the top three areas that you're concerned about, in their order of importance, with "1" being the most important. (BG-67, ET-55, FTM-52, MAD-42, PB-32, S/C-41&43, S/T-62)

In this part of the discussion, participants selected their top three concerns from a prepared list of seven, with the option to add concerns that did not appear on the list. The top four concerns in all seven groups were these: the condition of the family; education; jobs and economic development; and health care and insurance. (A complete compilation of responses is provided in Appendix C.)

Teacher participants were far more likely than any other group to identify the condition of the family as their number one concern. Citizens were more likely to identify education as their number one concern. Business people assigned roughly equal importance to education and jobs/economic development.

Representative Responses:

I start with the condition of the family cause I feel like everything starts there. (BG-70)

And the home is number three. And the home should be more important, but the home's deteriorated beyond repair just about in my opinion. You know it's tremendously in bad shape. And it's the most important thing that we have really, but I've got it on the bottom of the list because I don't expect it to improve a lot. (BG-74)

....the family is the basis of any community.... (ET-57)

And the education system, if we can get that improved some, would help the other areas that you have listed on the paper.... (ET-59)

I feel like the education is the most important thing on the list because that's what's molding the young minds of the future. (ET-60)

I had condition of the family is one. Education is two. Jobs and economic development is three. My personal thoughts are that if you have a good type family structure and reasonable education available that the others would just come on in line. If we have a good family unit and good family supports [for] the children and a good education system for them to come and be educated I think the jobs will come. (MAD-45)

I put the condition of the family first, simply because I see that as the main base, and then education as part of that. (FTM-54)

Well, without a good education you can't hope for, really, too much of anything. (S/C-43)

SECTION E. INVOLVEMENT WITH REFORM

1. *The community's role*

Key Question:

Do you think the community has a role to play in education reform?
What should the role be? (ET-66, FTM-54, MAD-49, PB-36, S/C-46 S/T-71)

Participants in the six groups that considered the first question agree that the community has a role to play in education reform. Responses about the nature of the community's role ranged from suggestions that the community must simply "survive" education reform to calls for community members to provide positive support for the reform effort.

Representative Responses:

Give it feedback. I think the teachers and the administrators need to hear from us, what we see, and give them a different point of view. (FTM-55)

Need more community activities with people in each community getting together and making more of the decisions. (PB-36)

Key Question:

Do you think people in the communities are interested in participating in education reform? (ET-68, PB-37, S/C-47, S/T-72)

Some participants firmly stated that people in their communities are interested in participating in education reform and need more invitation and direction to do so. Some parents said the schools do not want them involved or cannot figure out how to use them well.

Some participants believe the entrenched political system in their communities prevents people from getting involved. Some participants, particularly in the teacher groups, at first said they believe parents and others in the community are not interested in their schools. With further probing, a number of teachers said that the number of uninterested parents is, in fact, very small, and that it is economic pressures that keep parents from being involved with education.

Representative Responses:

I don't think they are as aware as they need to be. (BG-75)

But I have found, with my experience, that once the children get out of school, then they [parents] really don't care. (ET-68)

I see support coming from many different areas. (ET-69)

If the school board would let the parents get more involved and the school board members would listen, we can help. (PB-37)

It's hard to get parents to come into schools for anything. (S/T-72)

You know, we never see the parents we need to see. (S/T-73)

Key Question:

Do you feel personally that you could help with the reform effort? (ET-69, PB-38, S/C-49)

Participants answered this question as if it were about their involvement in their own schools. A few people expressed confidence that they know how to be involved with their schools. A few participants said they wanted to be involved but had no idea how to approach or assist the schools. A small number said they had had negative experiences when they approached schools in the past. A fourth group described a

variety of ways to become involved with school systems, including board meetings, P.T.A., and volunteering.

Representative Responses:

And when you think about how many people work for the school system, a lot of times, that affects what people will do and say and how involved they'll get. (ET-71)

I think the best way to get involved is to elect a new board of education. (PB-39)

I've been involved in [schools] all my life, but Lord knows I'd be a lot richer man if I'd kept my mouth shut. (PB-39)

P.T.A. is something, but it's....pretty laughable. (S/C-49)

They do publish the dates of the Board meeting on the school calendar every year. They do let us know....more than they used to. (S/C-49)

Key Questions:

Do you think people of the community know about ways to get involved with reform? (PB-37, S/T-73)

Do you see some ways to get people more concerned about the schools? (ET-72)

In the groups that considered the questions about how to get involved with reform, most participants felt that people in the community need more information about schools and about reform. Participants did not distinguish between involvement with schools and involvement with reform. Some participants in most groups expressed a need for more information about reform.

Representative Responses:

A lot of people feel like, too, that they are not educated themselves enough to speak up. (PB-38)

....maybe provide, on the state level, again, workshops that will be open to parents to come in and learn more about reform.... (S/T-74)

They don't even know what it is. (S/T-74)

I think maybe the school system, superintendent's office, or somebody, could give us....try to keep us more continually informed about what's going on, maybe through the newspapers or whatever. (ET-72)

If we're going to do it, we've got to do it for all the school system, not elementary or middle school or high school, but everybody. (ET-73)

2. *The role of the business community*

Key Questions:

Do you feel that people in the business community are interested in helping with education reform? (FTM-56, MAD-49)

Do you feel that people in the business community generally know about ways to help with the reform effort? (FTM-59)

Do you feel that your business can help with the way education reform is carried out? (FTM-59, MAD-50)

What incentives would encourage your business to become involved? (FTM-61, MAD-52)

Participants in the two business groups answered the first three questions. The answers were strongly positive. The business people see a role for businesses in schools; that role includes general support, participation in career development, and partnership efforts. Participants in both business groups said they would like to know more about ways to become involved in schools. Like those in the citizen groups, participants in business groups did not draw sharp distinctions between participation in reform efforts and participation in schools. Also, like the citizen groups, they feel they lack information about how to get involved.

Representative Responses:

We used to occasionally go and do little sessions explaining what we do and what our job is. (ET-82)

Yeah. I'd like to see a lot more of that. (ET-82)

....they could be in the schools a lot more. (BG-78)

There is a partnership program but some are more active than others. (BG-79)

The better educated I can get employees that I'm going to hire, being selfish, the more money I have the opportunity to make. (FTM-58)

I think school systems are sorely lacking a position that would pay for itself and that would be someone in public relations. (FTM-59)

"I think the incentive's there; I mean, they're our future. They're our future customers, our future workers, our competitors, and we need all of them." (FTM-61)

Business people in both groups feel they have a great deal to offer, and that the schools have not yet discovered how to take advantage of all the businesses are willing to do. Some business people made specific reference to the schools' failure to consult with them about growth projections, trends, and other information which they develop as a matter of routine, and which should be useful to schools as they plan facilities and curriculum. One said:

I think its kind of interesting that we've had a number of calls at (NAME DELETED) where I work and wanting to know what we were projecting growth to be and what we think is going to happen and what areas are being developed but we've never had any calls from the board of education asking what section of town a school should be built in. (MAD-51)

Key Question:

What do you see as the appropriate relationship between the business community and schools? (FTM-61, MAD-52, PB-40, S/C-51, S/T-75)

Participants in two business groups, two community groups, and one teacher group answered this question. The participants in these groups were in substantial agreement in support of more business involvement in schools. Participants recognize that business support for schools has been noteworthy in recent years. Some participants suggested that businesses should use their sponsorships to place more emphasis on the academic side of education instead of on sports.

Representative Responses:

We have a community college here that has grown tremendously because they have been very close to business. They've been very interactive and they've gone into industries and have said, "What do you need us to do?" And they enjoy a tremendous amount of success and I think that the closer our school system grows towards the business community and the more the business community embraces them the more successful the school system will be. (MAD-53)

I think that they should sponsor more for education than sports. (PB-41)

I think big business does more to support teachers than the politicians and school administrators all combined. You look at companies like Ashland Oil or television stations like Lexington, they do spotlights on education. They praise and support education much more, I think, than almost any other, uh, you know, source I can think of, really. (S/T-79)

3. *The role of teachers*

Key Question:

Do you feel teachers have a special role to play in relation to the community and education reform? (S/T-75)

Moderators asked this question in one teacher group, and gathered the information from the other teacher group through conversation following other questions. Because participants in the business groups and citizen groups placed such strong emphasis on teachers as the primary trustworthy sources of information, the moderators probed to discover whether teachers are aware of the esteem in which they are held by others in their community.

Teachers recognize that they play a role as the community's "line and their connection," (S/T-79) and feel they are in something of a bind. Some teachers in the two groups included in this research do not support the reform effort wholeheartedly, and therefore they do not want to take on the role of advocate or ambassador for reform.

Representative Response:

I have a lot of parents that ask me about the primary program and what my opinion of it is, and we have been told to be positive about it, especially till we see how it goes. We had a newspaper reporter come around and do a little story on the ungraded primary at our school and, again, we were very cautious about being positive. So, we're a little bit in a pinch right now. The parents do ask us, but we're a little bit reluctant to express everything. (S/T-75)

4. *The role of families*

Key Questions:

What is the appropriate relationship between schools and families? (ET-78, FTM-62, S/C-50)

How do you feel when you visit your community's schools? (ET-82, FTM-63, PB-42, S/C-54)

Participants in every group discussed this topic, whether in response to this question or others. Unanimously, participants who commented on the relationship between schools and families spoke of the need for close cooperation. In nearly every case, participants in business groups, teacher groups, and citizen groups spoke of the need for improvements in the school-family relationship. As one participant put it: "I think they should be a lot more together than what they are now". (ET-78)

Participants who are content with their schools express satisfaction and a feeling of welcome when they visit their community's schools. Other participants, perhaps a slight majority, describe their feelings about visiting their schools as "sad" (PB-42) or "nervous" (S/C-55).

Representative Responses:

I was just in (NAME DELETED) the other day, and they were very friendly. (ET-83)

I'm comfortable. (FTM-64)

Well, when I had to go have a conversation with the principal at the school where my son goes.... I didn't like the feeling I got. (S/C-54)

I still get nervous going to the principal. (S/C-55)

5. *The role of students*

Key Questions:

Let me ask about the kids themselves. What should they do as a part of this reform? (BG-80, ET-84, FTM-66, MAD-53, PB-43, S/C-58, S/T-79)

How about things like more homework, or longer school day, or longer school year? (BG-82, ET-87 & 89, MAD-53, PB-43&44)

Do you think they need to work harder than they do now? (FTM-67, S/C-58)

What does "work harder" mean to you? (FTM-67)

The questions about the students' role in reform seemed to take participants in every group by surprise. Most participants indicated their belief that the students are respondents to the education process and not powerful, capable actors in their own right, although a number of participants did suggest that students needed to "be responsible for their own education." (BG-81) (S/T-79)

In the follow-up questions, moderators asked participants to respond to suggestions that students should do more homework, have a longer school day, or a longer school year. One citizen group supported more homework. All other groups expressed the opinion that homework at present is adequate, or that homework in itself may not be a good idea or an effective education practice. With minor exceptions, participants did not support lengthening the school day.

In two groups, participants expressed substantial support for lengthening the school year. They said they know the school year is longer in other countries, and they expressed concern about the amount of information students forget during our extended summer vacations.

Representative Responses:

Something should be done with a lot of their attitudes. (S/T-79)

I don't go with the longer school day, but I....you know, there are....some parts of the country, they go to school all year round.... (ET-87)

I really do think, though, that we could do with a longer school year. I don't think a longer school day would benefit. I personally feel like six to seven hours....is plenty....a day. (S/C-59)

I feel with that long summer break, that that is too long, that they forget the information that they have learned a few months before. They have too much time for their brains to go to jelly. (FTM-69)

I think it's just about right now. They need time to be young. (PB-44)

I think that might ought to be looked at from grades one through three. I think that the current hours would be fine for that grade. And stepping up more hours as they go through the grades. (PB-45)

They've actually got more homework from some teachers than what they have time to accomplish it at home. (ET-89)

I feel that a....an hour to an hour and a half worth of homework at home should be enough for any student in a day. They've already spent 8 to 10 hours away from home, by the time they took the bus....six hours in the classroom and so forth. (ET-89)

They need a little bit of private time. (ET-90)

The question about whether students need to work harder received mixed responses.

Representative Responses:

Some do, some don't. (FTM-67)

Absolutely. (FTM-67)

Most of them. (S/C-58)

I'd rather see them have more hours in school. (FTM-67)

SECTION F. RESPONSE TO STATEMENTS ABOUT EDUCATION

Key Question:

I want to get your responses to some statements about Kentucky education. I'll read each one and then ask you for just quick reactions to them. (BG-84, ET-90, FTM-74, MAD-54, PB-46, S/C-62, S/T-82)

Moderators asked participants in all seven groups to respond to seven short statements about education. Some participants responded as if the statements were true-false questions. Others responded as if the statements were slogans or statements of intention. Of the seven statements, participants responded most positively to these three:

- o Education and our community--a partnership for our future
- o Global competition requires a better education
- o Education makes the difference

While most participants seemed appreciative of the sentiments included in statements such as "Schools serve all our children," and "Schools and families are there to support each other," they did not give these statements whole-hearted support. Instead, they typically responded that the statements reflect conditions that should exist, but do not exist at present. The seven statements, their location in the transcripts, and a sampling of responses to them are presented below.

Schools serve all of our children. (BG-84, ET-90, FTM-74, MAD-54, PB-46, S/C-62, S/T-82)

They certainly do. (FTM-74)

I think they try. (FTM-74)

I think they fail. (FTM-74)

No. I don't think they do. (PB-46)

No. Because I think that the classification, people put restrictions on the kids due to background. (PB-46)

Schools and families are there to support each other. (BG-85, ET-90, FTM-75, MAD-54, PB-47, S/C-62, S/T-82)

We would like to think so. (BG-85)

Should be. (BG-85)

Yes. (ET-90)

Well, it's not always true. (ET-91)

Ideally that's true. (MAD-54)

They're not, but should be. (S/C-62)

That's an idealistic situation. (S/T-82)

Education and our community -- a partnership for our future. (BG-85, ET-91, MAD-55, PB-48, FTM-75, S/T-83)

I'm just saying this is a lovely theory and I agree with it wholeheartedly. But how many of us are actually going to do this? (BG-88)

One person's not going to go off and do it on their own. But if, as a school, you got together and said, "Okay, we want to improve this aspect of our life...." And so, everybody is more motivated. You motivate each other to talk to other people about it. (BG-89)

It's getting there; I'll put it that way. (ET-92)

Sounds like an advertisement. (PB-48)

They need to be. They should be. (S/T-83)

The business community supports education. (BG-90, ET-92, FTM-75, MAD-55, PB-48, S/C-63, S/T-83)

To some degree. (BG-91)

If they had more....personal contact, I think they would feel more motivation to give. (BG-91)

....business in general, with the solicitation, that they get might do as much as they think they can. (ET-93)

In order for me to give you this; you have to agree to let me do something else. (PB-48)

I wish they did more. (S/C-64)

Global competition requires a better education. (BG-93, ET-96, FTM-76, MAD-55, PB-48, S/C-66, S/T-83)

Of course. (BG-94)

Absolutely. (ET-96)

I say it's a must. (PB-49)

We're no longer number one. (S/C-66)

True. (S/T-83)

Education makes the difference. (BG-94, ET-97, FTM-76, MAD-55, PB-49, S/C-71, S/T-83)

I saw that on a bumper sticker. (BG-95)

Sounds positive. (BG-95)

Well, it makes part of the difference, not all the difference, but it makes a lot of it. (FTM-76)

Absolutely. (PB-49)

Yes. (S/T-83)

It takes a whole community to raise a child. (BG-95, ET-97, FTM-77, MAD-55, PB-49, S/C-71, S/T-84)

It really does. (BG-96)

Starting with the family. (BG-96))

If I interpret this as meaning the community provides services and....educational opportunities....and recreational opportunities to make my child a better person, I agree with it. But if you were saying that the community is taking responsibility for a child, I don't agree with it. (BG-96)

That's what I've heard on the radio, on that blip. (ET-98)

I think it's neat. (ET-98)

You'd have to define community for me before I could answer that. (PB-49)

Well, the parents has to be the center, the heart, 50%. (PB-50)

SECTION G. GENERATING SUPPORT FOR REFORM

Key Question:

If you had the job of increasing support for education reform in Kentucky, what would you emphasize? (BG-98, ET-101, FTM-77, MAD-55, PB-51, S/C-71, S/T-84)

Most participants responded to this question as if they had been asked what would improve education in Kentucky. Participants in one business group and one teacher group focused on education reform and emphasized the importance of "getting teachers excited about it" (S/T-85). A participant spoke for several others in saying "... I think it won't be accomplished until you get the teachers pushing for it instead of kind of holding back against it." (MAD-56)

Representative Responses:

Communication with parents. (BG-98)

Dissemination of information to make....let more people know and be aware of what's going on. (ET-101)

I would emphasize that we're going to take state legislature out of education, the politics of state legislature out of education. (FTM-78)

I would sell it on the fact that each community is in charge of its own operation with certain minimum standards required. (FTM-78)

Now you're out here trying to sell this to the general population and I think a lot of the teachers here a) don't understand it or b) don't believe it. So I think it won't be accomplished until you get the teachers pushing for it instead of kind of holding back against it. (MAD-56)

I would emphasize its innovations. I think that there was a sense in Kentucky that we had a semi-broke system. When people have that sense they are willing to try something new. (MAD-56)

Programs to help....for the gifted as well as the ones that have the problems--the developmental disabilities. Money for targeted areas to equal them. (PB-52)

Parental involvement. I guess. Allow the parents to be able to be involved. (PB-53)

Some way of testing teachers. (S/C-72)

Selling it to teachers, getting teachers excited about it is the key to it. (S/T-85)

I think once people understand it and they've experienced it, they'll have a whole better attitude about it.... (S/T-85)

Key Question:

....if you were designing the ideal message to support education reform, what would you say? (BG-99, ET-103, FTM-79, MAD-57, PB-53, S/C-73, S/T-90)

Participants emphasized involvement, cooperation, and information. All the suggestions tended toward practical, common sense messages such as "Let's work to make it work." (PB-54)

Representative Responses:

Be your child's education partner. (BG-100)

Get involved. (ET-103)

I think what would get my interest about it is if I could see our lawmakers really showing some genuine interest in doing something really solid for education. Then I wouldn't mind working. And I wouldn't mind paying some more taxes if I knew it was going to go where it's supposed to go. (ET-108)

We're all in this together. (PB-53)

For this to work, everybody that's connected with it is going to have to do the job. The teachers, and plumb up to Frankfort. (PB-54)

V. CONCLUSIONS

The purposes of this research were to determine how Kentucky citizens, business people, and teachers view education reform nearly two years after the passage of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act, and to determine what strategies will work best to promote its implementation. Since the sponsors of the research are supporters of reform, the conclusions are framed for their use.

1. Reasons for hope about reform implementation in 1992

Kentucky's reform supporters have firm grounds for optimism about the future of reform. Here are seven reasons for hope about reform implementation.

o **Where Kentuckians have experience with implemented reforms that reflect the intent of the legislation, responses are positive, even enthusiastic.**

As the legislative timetable is followed over the next two years, more and better implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act should result in an increasing number of natural allies who see reform working and like what they see. Examples of successful reform implementation are already increasing, compared to 1991. It will be possible to build on these successful examples in the future.

o **Kentuckians value education highly.**

Years of effective work by citizen advocates and media about the need for improvements in Kentucky schools, and the stream of media stories about

the failure of schools nationally, have resulted in the nearly complete disappearance of any indifference Kentucky citizens may once have felt toward education. A solid foundation of public support for education is now in place.

- o **Kentuckians recognize that their schools as a whole need massive improvements.**

Kentuckians recognize the system as "broke," and are still open, in 1992, to the possibility of fixing it. Even teachers, who sometimes defend school practices that were in place before KERA, mostly recognize the need for some kind of change. While negative assessments of the schools can drain as well as build energy for working on reform, public support for school reform would not exist without widespread acknowledgement that something needs to change.

- o **Even opponents of reform have recognized it as a force with staying power.**

In the 1991 focus groups, a number of participants--particularly educators--expected Kentucky legislators to change or back away from reform. That sentiment has disappeared. One of the strongest positive forces for reform is the knowledge that reform implementation is largely on track, and that at least two more years of implementation will continue on roughly the original legislative schedule.

- **Many owners and managers of small businesses are inclined to support reform.**

Business people know a reasonable amount about the intentions behind reform, and are willing to invest more in local schools. They are a strong potential source of support because of their influence within their communities.

- **Some elements of reform—those not aimed directly at changes in classroom practices—are based on philosophies that are both transparent and appealing to Kentuckians.**

The most significant of these elements is school-based decision making, which citizens recognize as based on the philosophy that communities--especially teachers and parents--should own their own schools and make most decisions about their local schools. The four-year old program, the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, and the anti-nepotism provisions are other reform elements for which the philosophical underpinnings are clear, and public support is strong. If a promotion effort can assist citizens in associating the whole of reform with the parts they already recognize as immediately valuable, support for reform overall will increase.

- **No major concern is brewing over the taxes that support reform.**

2. Reasons for concern about reform implementation in 1992

Reform is not yet a way of life in Kentucky communities and classrooms. Until it is, supporters of reform must work to address a series of concerns that could

hamper implementation. Here are eleven reasons for concern as the third year of implementation begins.

- o **Reform is an orphan--neither citizens, business people nor even teachers assume responsibility for it.**

Aside from the few highly successful and well known education advocacy groups in the state, community or citizen ownership of reform does not yet exist to any great extent in Kentucky. In these seven focus groups even supporters of reform believed the legislators, the Department of Education, or education experts are its owners.

- o **Although both citizens and education policy makers agree schools need changing, they do not share a vision of appropriate education practices.**

Education policy makers, including those who created the components of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, are focused primarily on leading students to develop skills and master the process of learning. A substantial number of citizens, in contrast, still want the schools to "return to the basics." They want the schools to focus on mastery of content--a body of knowledge including communicating and calculating--because students demonstrably lack that mastery today. For the most part, focus group participants, including the teachers, do not describe the schools' problems in terms of their failure to teach students to reason, think, cooperate, and solve problems--the learning gaps the Kentucky Education Reform Act was created to address. Few

participants, if any, seemed aware that the Reform Act, thoroughly implemented, could result in student mastery of the old basics and far more.

- o **Citizens do not support reform as enthusiastically as do education policy makers and advocates.**

Education policy makers have participated over several years in a variety of processes through which they have come to some agreement about what will improve schools. As they developed the reform legislation, members of the Kentucky General Assembly had access to many of the policy makers and advocates whose work serves as the philosophical underpinning for the Reform Act. Citizens, in contrast, have not had the opportunity to learn why and how each aspect of reform is expected to work, or how the reform can address their most basic worries about their schools: students graduate or leave school without the skills necessary to be good workers or good students in higher education institutions; in-school discipline is declining and violence is increasing; children seem to lack self-confidence and ordinary life skills. Until citizens see a clear connection between reform provisions and their own compelling needs for school improvement, their support for reform will lag. The same holds true for many teachers.

- o **Citizens and teachers differ from education experts in their expectations of change in schools.**

Citizens' perceptions that their schools are not working create some space for them to embrace reform, but these perceptions also seem almost to

overwhelm their energies for investing in new possibilities. By contrast, reforms and new possibilities are the business of the education policy makers and advocates, many of whom do not share with teachers and parents in these groups the daily frustration and energy drain of teaching or rearing children in a difficult school system.

- o **Citizens and teachers have differing views about the role each plays in educating children; these differences complicate the process of building ownership of reform.**

Teachers want parents to send them children motivated to learn. Many teachers believe parents are not pulling their fair share of the load of educating children. Many teachers criticize parents for their failure to come to school when they should, instill proper respect for teachers, lay the ground work for necessary in-school discipline, or provide appropriate support at home for the learning that takes place in school during the day.

Teachers do not talk about children and families as if they recognize either the changes in Kentuckians' attitudes about education (more supportive than in the past) or the changes in family structure and situation (more economic pressures, more parents raising children alone.) In fact, teachers see families as the source of a great deal of the schools' problems. When asked to identify which of several issues they considered most important, 19 of 24 teachers (79.2 percent) chose "the condition of the family" as their first priority. Teachers were four times as likely as citizens and business people to identify the condition of the family as their first priority concern.

For their part, citizens want teachers to motivate their children to learn. Even though they agree with teachers that discipline problems are worse than in the past, most citizens want teachers and schools to solve those problems.

In addition, citizens want more ways to be involved with schools than they presently have. At present, they say their involvement takes the form of supporting the completion of homework, attending PTA/PTO meetings, making one school visit per year or per semester, and, in the lower grades, serving as volunteers. They sense that they need to be involved in more important and meaningful roles, but they do not feel invited or welcomed at many of their local schools. Even when the school presents no obvious barriers to parent involvement, citizens express frustration because they do not know how they can make a difference. They do not know how to exercise their ownership rights and responsibilities for the schools in their communities.

One important result of reform is that a small number of citizens in the focus groups identified school-based decision making as an important step in the appropriate direction. Even though the concept of parent control of local schools is still new and outside the experience of most Kentuckians, as reform implementation continues more Kentuckians may see school councils as one important new means for carrying out their interests in school ownership.

In the disagreement between parents and teachers about who should motivate children to learn, no one in the focus groups stated what some education experts believe: that children are natural learners who are eager to

learn if the circumstances are right and if their native curiosity is cultivated, not squelched.

- o **Through both past and present practices, schools and communities have separated themselves from each other.**

The differences are now greater than ever. Teachers want parents involved through supporting the learning process at home. Parents don't consider that to be adequate involvement, but have no better ideas about how to participate directly in schools. They do not feel wanted or needed at school.

Business people want to invest more in local schools but don't know how, beyond making donations in response to the many direct solicitations they receive each year. They feel their business expertise could assist with school planning and management, but they are left out of the decision-making process. Teachers want the business community more involved with their classrooms and their students, but lack time and knowledge about how to make that happen.

- o **Most Kentuckians associate reform with politicians, and most Kentuckians share the current national disillusionment with politicians.**

Kentuckians, like most other Americans, make many judgments and decisions out of a framework that includes fundamental skepticism about anything originated by elected officials. That skepticism is reinforced and augmented by negative histories with particular local schools.

- **Kentucky citizens and teachers are quick to form negative judgments about reform.**

Because they do not feel ownership of reform, citizens and teachers feel little loyalty to it. They do not give reform implementation efforts many chances to prove themselves before they form a negative judgment.

- **A sizable number of Kentuckians have already formed negative opinions about some key element of reform.**

The greatest number of questions raised in the seven groups concern the primary program, but people are also skeptical about the assessment program. As a result, it may be more difficult--though still vitally important--to encourage citizen ownership of these elements of reform.

- **Teachers are essential to the success of reform, but at present they are not ideal spokespeople for it.**

Teachers are essential for the long term success of reform because of the many ways they influence it. These include:

- > Control over the extent and effectiveness of reform as it is implemented in classrooms
- > Influence on community members' attitudes toward and assessments of reform
- > Influence on children's attitudes about reform, and, through the children, on their parents' attitudes
- > Sway over fellow teachers' opinions, both in the same and in other school systems.

While citizens, business people, and teachers themselves say they place great value on information that comes from teachers, teachers as a group do not yet support reform enthusiastically. Unless the large majority of teachers choose to support reform, and to explain their support to people in their communities, other means of promoting citizen support for and ownership in reform may have difficulty succeeding.

o **Teachers need more information and support.**

As in 1991, and in spite of the fact that they have more information than in the past, teachers continue to express pressing needs for more information about what reform is and how it should be implemented. Teachers say they need more intensive, high-quality professional development; opportunities to visit successful implementation sites; and more consistent and timely information from the Department of Education. While a few teachers made a case for a return to teaching with a curriculum guide in hand, most recognize that their own teaching practices are going to change profoundly as part of reform, and they want to get on with the business of mastering appropriate new teaching practices. If advocacy groups could help meet these needs, they might build some indestructible bridges to teachers that would make it easier to persuade teachers to take an active role as ambassadors for reform.

3. Status of reform

As the third year of reform implementation begins, reform is not in immediate danger in the state, but it is not in prime condition either. Citizen ownership of reform does not yet exist in most communities, and most teachers are not yet ready either to implement reform or to advocate for it enthusiastically.

Perhaps the greatest difficulties at this early stage of reform implementation stem simply from the many new ideas reform embodies, and the gap between education experts' understanding of those new ideas and a parallel understanding on the part of teachers and the public. The new ideas include changes in the ways schools are governed and administered; new recommendations for classroom practices; new concepts about what it means to educate a child; new relationships between local schools and the Department of Education; new requirements of parents and citizens; and many new demands on teachers to make more decisions and master both new knowledge and new practices.

All the demands of these new ideas are counterbalanced by two important factors. The first factor is the ongoing strong support within the Legislature for the continued implementation of reform efforts over at least the next two years. This firm stance is doing much to persuade doubters and resisters that reform is taking place, and to dissuade people who might work against reform if they thought it an easy target.

The second factor is the continuing expansion of implementation by schools and teachers who value the premises of reform. This should result in a natural

increase in citizen and teacher support for reform. With growing public confidence in the Legislature's long-term commitment, and with the active, growing advocacy of the citizens, teachers, and groups already in strong support of education reform, the situation at the end of the second year of implementation looks reasonable and workable.

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY

A. BACKGROUND

In May, 1992 the researchers conducted seven focus groups for the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and the Partnership for Kentucky School Reform. Focus groups met at the following locations in Kentucky: Bowling Green, Elizabethtown, Ft. Mitchell, Madisonville, Prestonsburg, and Somerset (two groups).

B. PURPOSE

In order to better understand how best to convey information about the Kentucky Education Reform Act, and to learn how to increase understanding of the reform and support for it, the researchers used the focus groups to explore participants' views on public schools and on recent education reform efforts in the state.

C. FORMAT

A total of 70 people participated in seven focus groups, each of which lasted approximately two hours. A facilitator led each focus group, asking participants questions about the following topics:

- o Their impressions of what their local schools do most well and least well
- o Their sources of information about local schools and about the Kentucky Education Reform Act and its implementation

- o Their familiarity with and opinions about aspects of the Kentucky Education Reform Act
- o Their assessment of the relative importance of several issues, including education
- o Their responses to a series of statements about Kentucky education

The researchers designed the focus group questions to elicit statements reflecting what participants value about education and to elicit their ideas and suggestions for ways to frame a successful effort to advance education reform in Kentucky. The questions encouraged conversation that revealed the attitudes and values underlying participants' opinions.

D. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

A professional market research and opinion polling firm recruited a total of 112 participants for the groups. Recruiters used random selection and a telephone screening system to construct groups that included a cross section of participants in each location.

The groups in Elizabethtown and Prestonsburg, and one of the Somerset groups, included only community members who are not public school employees. The recruiter confirmed a sample of 16 people per site, including participants who represent some of their communities' diversity in terms of gender, race, age, status as a parent of a child presently in school, and location of residence--inside or outside the city limits.

The Ft. Mitchell and Madisonville groups included only small business owners and managers. These groups were recruited from lists for local Chambers of Commerce. The recruiter confirmed a sample of 16 people per site, including participants who represent some of their communities' diversity in terms of gender, age, and location of residence-- inside or outside the city limits.

The Bowling Green group and one of the Somerset groups included only teachers. Recruiters confirmed a sample of sixteen teachers per site, representing a cross section of the target school systems in terms of gender, race, school level, and years of experience in education.

Because of attrition among those agreeing to participate, the actual groups differed slightly in composition from the pattern established in the recruiter's sample. More detailed information about participants in all groups is presented in Appendix B.

E. CAUTION ABOUT GENERALIZING TO A LARGER POPULATION

This study, based on a set of focus groups, is a form of qualitative research, which permits exploration of opinions, values, attitudes and perceptions of a relatively small number of people in some depth. Unlike quantitative research, which examines precise responses of a random sample of respondents in order to predict how larger populations would respond to the same questions, qualitative research aims at discovering previously unknown opinion patterns, describing points of view in detail, and generating insights based on lengthier investigations with a small number of people. The results of qualitative research cannot be used to predict the responses of larger populations with statistical accuracy. Instead, qualitative research results are

intended to deepen understanding of complex issues, questions, and problems as a
carefully selected cross-section of people see them.

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

ALL GROUPS

	Bowling Green	Elizabeth- town	Fort Mitchell	Madison- ville	Prestons- burg	Somerset Teachers	Somerset Citizens	TOTAL
GENDER								
Females	9	4	4	1	6	6	6	36
Males	5	5	6	8	4	4	2	34
RACE								
Black	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	4
White	12	9	10	8	10	10	7	66

CITIZEN GROUPS				
	Somerset	Elizabethtown	Prestonsburg	Total
GENDER				
Females	6	4	6	16
Males	2	5	4	11
RACE				
Black	1	0	0	1
White	7	9	10	26
PARENT/NON-PARENT				
Parent	4	6	4	14
Non-parent	4	3	6	13
AGE				
18-24	0	0	1	1
25-34	1	3	3	7
35-44	3	3	3	9
45-54	3	1	0	4
55-64	0	1	1	2
65+	1	1	2	4
RESIDENCE				
Inside city limits	3	4	5	12
Outside city limits	5	5	5	15
EDUCATION				
Less than H.S. graduate	0	0	2	2
High School graduate	5	3	5	13
Some college	3	3	2	8
College graduate	0	2	0	2
Graduate school	0	1	1	2

TEACHER GROUPS			
	Somerset	Bowling Green	Total
GRADE LEVEL			
Elementary	5	7	12
Middle	1	2	3
High	4	5	9
YEARS IN SYSTEM			
1-5	0	2	2
6-10	2	1	3
11-15	3	1	4
16-20	5	4	9
21 +	0	6	6
GENDER			
Females	6	9	15
Males	4	5	9
RACE			
Black	0	2	2
White	10	12	22
AGE			
25-34	2	2	4
35-44	5	7	12
45-54	2	3	5
55-64	1	2	3

BUSINESS GROUPS			
	Madisonville	Ft. Mitchell	Total
GENDER			
Females	1	4	5
Males	8	6	14
RACE			
Black	1	0	1
White	8	10	18
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES			
Less than 10	6	7	13
10-25	2	0	2
26-50	0	2	2
51-99	1	0	1
Unknown	0	1	1

APPENDIX C

PRIORITIES FOR PUBLIC ISSUES

Participants were asked to choose issues which are of greatest importance to them. The table shows how many participants chose each issue as ranking first, second, and third in importance for them.

ALL GROUPS			
Areas of Concern	First Rank	Second Rank	Third Rank
Jobs and economic development	13	22	11
Health care and insurance	3	7	16
Crime	0	2	3
Education	20	24	17
Drug abuse	3	4	3
The condition of the family	28	5	12
The environment	3	5	8
Other (government)	0	1	0

CITIZENS			
Areas of Concern	First Rank	Second Rank	Third Rank
Jobs and economic development	6	11	2
Health care and insurance	3	3	8
Crime	0	1	2
Education	12	7	6
Drug abuse	1	3	1
The condition of the family	5	1	4
The environment	0	1	4
Other	0	0	0

PRIORITIES FOR PUBLIC ISSUES

TEACHERS			
Areas Of Concern	First Rank	Second Rank	Third Rank
Jobs and economic development	1	6	4
Health care and insurance	0	3	6
Crime	0	0	1
Education	2	10	7
Drug abuse	0	1	0
The condition of the family	19	1	2
The environment	2	3	4
Other	0	0	0

BUSINESS PEOPLE			
Areas of Concern	First Rank	Second Rank	Third Rank
Jobs and economic development	6	5	5
Health care and insurance	0	1	2
Crime	0	1	0
Education	6	7	4
Drug abuse	2	0	2
The condition of the family	4	3	6
The environment	1	1	0
Other (government)	0	1	0

15-31-92

**THE PRICHARD COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE and
THE PARTNERSHIP FOR KENTUCKY SCHOOL REFORM
FOCUS GROUP FACT SHEET
July 1992**

PURPOSES:

- To develop greater understanding of Kentuckians' beliefs, attitudes and values about education reform.
- To develop research-based information for creation and implementation of community initiatives.

CONDUCTED: The focus groups were conducted by Roberts & Kay, Inc., a research and organizational communications firm based in Lexington, KY, during May 1992.

SAMPLE: Participants were randomly recruited by The Matrix Group, a market research firm in Lexington, KY

FORMAT:

- A total of 70 participants
- Three kinds of participant groups: general public; teachers; business people
- A facilitator led each group, asking participants:
 - > their impressions of their local schools;
 - > their sources of information on education;
 - > their familiarity and opinions about education reform;
 - > their responses to statements about Kentucky education; and
 - > how they ranked education in comparison with other important issues.

NUMBER: Seven

LOCATIONS:

Bowling Green	(teachers)
Elizabethtown	(citizens)
Ft. Mitchell	(business)
Madisonville	(business)
Prestonsburg	(citizens)
Somerset	(two groups: citizens; teachers)

SPONSORS: The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform

1992 FOCUS GROUPS

**Steve Kay, Ed.D.
Rona Roberts, Ph. D.**

**Roberts & Kay, Inc.
Lexington, Kentucky**

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increase in citizen and teacher support for reform. With growing public confidence in the Legislature's long-term commitment, and with the active, growing advocacy of the citizens, teachers, and groups already in strong support of education reform, the situation at the end of the second year of implementation looks reasonable and workable.

KEY FINDINGS

The seven focus groups in this study, conducted with a cross section of Kentucky citizens, business people, and a selected group of teachers, resulted in information that can be analyzed in five broad categories:

- A. The current climate of opinion about schools
- B. The current climate of opinion about education reform
- C. Views of specific elements of reform
- D. Sources of information about education reform
- E. Comparison with 1991 findings

The findings in the first four categories presented in this section represent a synthesis and analysis of participant opinions expressed in the seven sessions in 1992. The fifth category compares findings from this study with findings from a similar study conducted in June, 1991.

calculating, writing, speaking, and reading. They also worry that students leave school with low self-esteem and inadequate life skills.

Citizens presume that the children themselves are not at fault—under the right conditions, they can learn. Citizens feel it is the role of the teachers to motivate students to learn.

Teachers don't agree. They emphasize the family's role in preparing children for school, supporting the school's efforts, and instilling positive attitudes toward education. Teachers feel it is unfair to blame them for results that are not—and should not be—totally within their control.

Business people divide responsibility for education between families and schools. They hold the schools particularly accountable for failing to follow standard planning practices and for inadequate attention to teacher training.

At the same time, business people point out that families need to play the critical role in raising children. Many business people regret the weakened conditions of many families in their communities, and support the schools' efforts, under the Education Reform Act (KERA), to redress the deficits many families face.

3. *All participants strongly want increased parent-teacher collaboration.*

Teachers call for parents to be more involved with their children's education. For the most part teachers see the absence of parent involvement as a problem parents can and should solve. Most of the teachers seemed to see parental involvement primarily as parents providing in-home support for the learning the child is doing at school. Teachers want parents to send them students every morning who

public schools is when someone requests a donation. Some citizens think businesses have been schools' best supporters in recent years, and cite Ashland Oil as an example. Overall, the climate appears positive for increased school-business collaboration. All parties are interested, and see few barriers.

5. *Most participants accept the responsibility to pay taxes for schools; all would like more information on the uses of their tax dollars.*

Participants are willing to pay taxes for education. The few expressed overall objections to taxes did not evoke responses from other participants. People are more aware of the property tax increase than the sales tax or conformity with the federal tax.

Across the groups, people make one specific request when taxes are discussed: they want to know what their education taxes purchase. Participants know that taxes fund visible new or improved school facilities, and some cited teacher raises as one tax expenditure, but most said they did not know the other ways in which tax monies are spent. Many participants are concerned that there seems to be insufficient money for education despite the recent tax increase; most have a hard time understanding how this is possible. They resent the way in which the Lottery was touted as an adequate source of funds for education, and continue to ask where the Lottery money goes. They fail to distinguish between Wilkinson campaign rhetoric about the Lottery and what "the state" promised to do with the Lottery money.

In some places where reform efforts have been implemented with less than strong support or good will, reactions to reform programs are strongly negative. The dearth of information about how to implement particular reforms, and politics-as-usual in selecting school council members in some schools, have caused a number of informed participants, including some teachers, to despair of reform ever happening.

2. *Teacher response to reform is mixed.*

Far more than citizens or business people, teachers recognize reform as a massive effort with many elements. Most teachers seemed familiar with the principles behind most reforms. Knowledge about the rationale for the primary program seemed weak among non-primary teachers, however, and few teachers seemed clear about the principles driving the assessment process. A few teachers in the two teacher groups welcome the challenge of stepping outside old constraints and accepting increased responsibility. Some have been participants in particular programs generated through reform and are strongly supportive of reform overall because they associate reform with the programs they have experienced, and they see positive results for their students.

Even those teachers, however, joined the majority of their colleagues in describing problems caused by change: added responsibility, increased work-load, lack of training and support, anxiety about school performance, and lack of clear direction for specific elements of reform. Teachers report particular frustration because they have come to expect direction from Frankfort, and that direction has

consider the possible benefits of overall reform for their community and for the state. Perhaps for that reason, business people were also more likely than other groups to consider overall reform as potentially positive, rather than potentially negative.

SECTION C. VIEWS OF SPECIFIC PARTS OF REFORM

1. *Primary Program*

The primary program received strong praise and enthusiastic testimony about its effectiveness from a number of participants who have seen their own children or children in their schools benefitting from it. The great majority of participants, however, including a few who have direct experience with the program, do not understand the rationale behind the program and have many questions and concerns about it--more than they have about any other reform program. They question whether teachers have the training to make it work, or whether brighter and older students can benefit from it. They equate the program with "lack of structure" and fear it will create unrealistic expectations and discipline problems in the higher grades. Citizens believe they are being asked to take it on faith that the primary program is a good thing, but in general they don't have much faith in the schools.

2. *Family Resource and Youth Services Centers*

Participants in the groups that discussed this program see the need for the centers and value the services they provide. A few participants had specific knowledge about the services the centers are providing or preparing to provide in

accountability, but some in each group questioned the amount of time needed for assessment and the relationship between assessment and what children need to learn. Teachers feel they have not been given adequate information about the new system or adequate training for it. Some feel that the assessment asks students to perform tasks for which they have not been prepared. A few teachers and parents have had direct experience with portfolios and reported positive student responses to them.

SECTION D. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT EDUCATION REFORM

1. *Teachers are the single most important source of information about reform*

Participants in all groups reported having strong faith in teachers as trustworthy sources of information about schools and education. The importance of the teachers' role in increasing support for reform is underscored by the fact that only children were mentioned nearly as often as teachers when participants identified preferred sources of accurate information about what is happening in schools. Teachers talk about their own opinions and experiences, and they clearly have a profound influence on both the community's and children's opinions and experiences. In addition, teachers talk with each other, and provide essential information to each other on particular aspects of reform.

schools or school systems. Teachers have more generalized information about reform than they had in 1991, and they also know more about specific programs that affect them. For example, elementary teachers know more about the primary program, and high school teachers know more about portfolios as part of the assessment program, although teachers report that their need for information is still great.

2. *Information sources are the same as in 1991*

As in 1991, citizens and business people see teachers as the key communicators about what is happening in the local schools, and teachers provide information directly, through the children they teach, and through their spouses, friends, and acquaintances. Children are a direct source of straight information. Local newspapers provide some information about local schools. Television is the main medium for information about statewide changes in education.

3. *Feelings of need for more information and training remain the same as in 1991*

Although some 1992 participants had some information on reform, most people still said they need more information. As in 1991, teachers complain that they get little information, that the information they get is sometimes not timely or incorrect, and that they are expected to do work for which they have had little or no training. It is important to note that even though available information has increased since 1991, teachers' feelings of needing more information have not abated. Teachers recognize the complexity and scope of reform, and know they need still more information if they are to implement it properly. On the other hand, many teachers have not adjusted to

In 1992, people have had direct experience with the reform effort. Where schools are implementing reform with a good will, people have something they can see that is good, that is useful, that is already making a difference. But in places where reform is being implemented against the teachers' will, against the administration's will, against the parents' will, the views are negative.

6. *Views on KERA as "one more cycle" that will come and go have changed since 1991*

While most participants still have some doubts about the ultimate staying power and effects of reform, the consistent message from the state, the persistence of legislative support, and evidence from initial implementation of reform elements are beginning to lay some doubts to rest. Even teachers who express the most skepticism talk in terms of a cycle that may take four or five years to play out. In contrast to last year, no participants suggested that the reform will be short-lived, or that the legislature will tamper with it.

7. *Views of KERA are becoming more polarized than in 1991*

Conjecture about what has happened or is likely to happen because of reform is more negative this year than last year, when it was more guarded, or neutral, or optimistic. Opinion is becoming more polarized. Last year, more people were simply neutral. People felt less informed last year, more cautious about coming to final judgment. This year, even though still lacking information, people seemed more willing to form opinions, and more willing to let those opinions be negative. When participants who lack direct experience with reform explained their negative